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SPECIAL SECTION: **TOP TRUCK CHALLENGE** **COMPETITORS REVEALED**

30 SUPERSTARS

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Carrying on the torch of the 4Runner legacy

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Beginning our long (off) road with our 2015 Pickup Truck of the Year



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GO ON THE COVER: Ken Brubaker manned the long-lens to capture Chris Bowman's '88 GMC Jimmy on the 2015 Top Truck Challenge Hill Climb.



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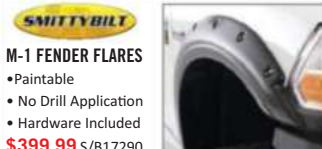
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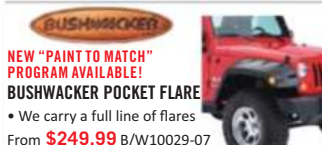
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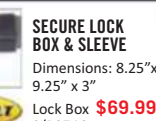
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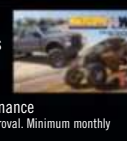
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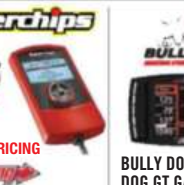


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1500	09-13	5.3L	2	+ 10 hp	K/N63-3070	\$305.99
2500 HD/3500	11-14	6.6L DSL	2	+ 19 hp	K/N63-3077	\$296.99
Tahoe	2015	5.3L	2	+ 11 hp	K/N63-3082	\$247.99
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F250/F350 SD	11-15	6.2L	2	+ 14 hp	K/N77-2582KTK	\$266.99
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Wrangler	12-15	3.6L	2	+ 12 hp	K/N63-1566	\$296.99
Wrangler	07-10	3.8L	1	+ 8 hp	K/N57-1553	\$262.99
Wrangler	97-06	4.0L	1	+ 12 hp	K/N57-1514-1	\$243.99
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2500/3500	13-15	6.7L DSL	2	+ 15 hp	K/N63-1568	\$219.99
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14-15 Silverado/Sierra 1500 2WD/4WD	2"	Front & Rear Leveling Kit	DAYKG09138BK	\$218.99
07-13 Silverado/Sierra 1500 2WD/4WD	2"	Front & Rear Leveling Kit	DAYKG09118BK	\$218.99
11-15 Silverado/Sierra 2500 2WD/4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKG09123	\$129.99
99-10 Silverado/Sierra 2500 2WD/4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKG09107	\$129.99
14-15 Tahoe/Suburban/Yukon 2WD/4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKG09134BK	\$129.99
Ford				
10-14 F-150 Raptor 4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKF09129BK	\$129.99
09-15 F-150 2WD/4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKF09124BK	\$129.99
05-15 F-250/F-350/F-450/F-550 4WD	2.5"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKF09119BK	\$129.99
99-15 F-250/F-350/F-450/F-550 2WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKF09101BK	\$129.99
Dodge				
09-15 Ram 1500 4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKC09113BK	\$129.99
09-15 Ram 1500 4WD	2"	Front & Rear Leveling Kit	DAYKC09114BK	\$159.99
94-13 Ram 2500/3500 4WD	2"	Front & Rear Leveling Kit	DAYKC09122BK	\$218.99
13-15 Ram 2500/3500 4WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit w/Shocks	DAYKC09138BK	\$239.99
14-15 Ram 3500 2WD	2"	Front Leveling Kit	DAYKC09134BK	\$159.99
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84-06 TJ/XJ/ZJ 2WD/4WD	1.75"	Leveling Kit (Pair)	DAYKJ09100BK	\$39.99
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07-16 Jeep JK	Center Hood Vents	DAYKJ71049BK	\$69.99
95-06 Jeep YJ / TJ	Hood Vents	DAYKJ71042BK	\$79.99

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Application	Description	Part #	Price
07-16 Jeep JK	Hood Wrangler	DAYKJ09146BK	\$24.99
97-06 Jeep TJ	Hood Wrangler	DAYKJ09146BK	\$24.99

Dash and Switch Panels

Application	Description	Part #	Price
11-15 Jeep JK	Dash Panel with GPS/Phone Cradle	DAYKJ71047BK	\$35.99
07-10 Jeep JK	Dash Panel with GPS/Phone Cradle	DAYKJ71020	\$24.99
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BFG13079	32X11.50R15	\$183.99	BFG10158	LT235/80R17	\$205.99	BFG36457	LT275/65R18	\$222.99
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BFG37301	LT215/70R16	\$192.99	BFG37495	LT255/70R17	\$212.99	BFG08017	LT305/65R18	\$321.99
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BFG49774	35X12.50R15	\$188.99	BFG34037	265/70R17	\$238.99
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No Time Like Now

I realized a dream this past summer. My oldest son, Charlie, and I drove my dad's Toyota Tacoma 4x4 from my parents' house in Marshfield, Massachusetts, over a scenic, meandering cross-country route to our home in San Diego, California. In all, we travelled about 3,800 miles, almost quite literally from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, give or take a hundred feet. We hit Niagara Falls in New York; A Christmas Story House museum in Cleveland, Ohio; Mount Rushmore and the town of Deadwood in South Dakota; Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument in Montana; Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming; and a whole bunch of other stuff up, over, around, and in between. We shared a full week of quality time, had awesome adventures, and made memories that will last both our lifetimes.

The thing is the trip really wasn't my dream. It was my mom and dad's. They talked and planned about making this exact journey for nearly 10 years, but something always came up and it kept getting pushed off

'til next year. But as painful as it is to say, my dad ran out of "next years." He passed away suddenly right before Christmas. He was instrumental in making me the man I am today, and without him, I might not know how to change a tire, let alone hold the automotive knowledge required to run an operation like *Four Wheeler*. He sat behind the wheel of the family auto for hundreds of hours of vacation journeys all over the country when I was a kid. I figured I'd take the wheel this time and make the trip he always planned. And you can come along too.

Check out the Epic XC trip at fourwheeler.com. There's no hardcore wheeling or crazy action. Just a dad and his son driving an all-original 325,000-mile 4x4 pickup across America and doing stuff and seeing things you've got no excuse for not doing or seeing yourself. There's no time like now, so get out there and grab some adventure!

—CHRISTIAN HAZEL

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ON TARGET?

First, let me express my belief that in the short period of time you have been responsible



for the content of *Four Wheeler* magazine, it has improved dramatically. The July issue was nearly perfect and is an issue that will make it into my automotive reference library for future reading.

I have really enjoyed the "Backward Glances" (I am old enough

to have personally driven the original Bronco when it was new) but also the recent article on the history of the Suburban, and the "F Series Facts" in the July issue offer a very interesting historical perspective. Articles such as "Ten Terrific Trips" and "Six Flags Over Big Bend" offer us the chance to bring out our maps and take a challenging road trip from the comfort of our sofa. Also, one article per month dealing with a complicated rear axle tear down is

enough. Perhaps also, one lift kit article per month would also be interesting, as well as inexpensive engine power improvement kits.

My wacky idea: A monthly road test of a new 4x4 vehicle that would also include:

1. A timed run around a defined off-road course.
2. A hillclimb test up a defined slope that would test traction and traction-assist systems, with perhaps a two-track ramp with offset rollers built in. (VW used a demonstration ramp like this at the Touareg launch to dealers in Arizona in May of 2003.)

I was going to allow my subscription to expire, but since you have changed the content, I have decided to renew.

RICHARD SHERRY
BOYNTON BEACH, FLORIDA

Thanks for sticking around, Richard. I'm glad you like what we're doing. I always enjoyed articles like that back when I was a *Four Wheeler* reader, and judging from the reader feedback on the July "Adventure Bound" issue, most current readers feel the same way. Plan on seeing more adventure travel-related content coming to *Four Wheeler*—everything from wild explorations to simple sightseeing trips anybody can duplicate.

As for the monthly vehicle test, that's something I thought would be cool to do since the first episode of *Top Gear* I saw many years ago. You know, basically rip off their "Star in a Reasonably Priced Car" segment with an off-road flair. However, we currently don't really have the resources to pull it off on a regular basis. Perhaps in the future.

EXPLORING EXPLORER

I have a question about the Explorer that appears in the July '15 issue on page 39. Can you give some info on its build or what all is



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done to it? If this vehicle has been in the magazine before, can you direct me to a back issue? Thanks a lot.

STEVEN WILLIS
VIA EMAIL

Freelancer, Brian Sumner responds: It's my '91 Explorer, which has a 4.0L V-6, five-speed manual transmission, and a swapped-in manually shifted BorgWarner 1354 T-case. I use a Skyjacker 2-inch lift and a 1-inch body lift to fit 32-inch Cooper STT tires mounted on 15-inch second-generation factory Explorer wheels. I swapped in a rear 8.8-inch axle with disc brakes—also from a second-generation Explorer—and regared the diffs with 4.10s. The front and rear are locked with lunchbox lockers. I built my own bumpers, rock sliders, skidplates, and longer radius arms for the front Dana 35 TTB suspension. I have also added on-board air, dual batteries, and a Warn winch mounted to a cradle that can be used in the front or rear.

TIMES TEN

In the story "Outdoor Gear" in the July '15 issue, the caption on page 68 says the

TrailHead trailer is 80 feet long and 50 feet wide. How big are the roads and trails where y'all are?

JEFF PITTMAN
TERRY, MS

TIMES TEN AGAIN

Love the magazine. Also glad to get the Adventure Bound info in this issue, as well as the first-aid tips.

While reading "Outdoor Gear," it gave me some great ideas on how to equip my rig. I'm planning on building my own off-road trailer, and then I ran across the one on page 68. I read the article three times and had to laugh. I don't think my Suzuki Samurai will tow the TrailHead trailer since it is 80 feet long and 50 feet wide. I guess an oversize



Looks deceptively small.

load permit will be needed. Ha ha, great magazine.

JOE ORTIZ
VIA EMAIL

Yeah, that'd be 8 by 5 feet. Sorry 'bout the goof. FW

WHERE TO WRITE

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BY **TORI TELLEM**
EDITOR@FOURWHEELER.COM

RIP

AUTOMOTIVE NEWS

THAT'S INTERESTING



➤ **100 Things For Every Gearhead to Do Before They Die** is a new book designed to give you an auto-centric send-off. It's a guide to automotive museums, driving schools, factory tours,

roads to take, and more. Get it through a site like amazon.com.

➤ **The seven vehicles no one** wants to own? Iseecars.com looked over 5 million new '14 model year vehicles sold and then went back and looked a year later to see how many were now being sold as used. The winning losers: Buick Regal, Chevy Sonic, BMW X1, Dodge Charger, Mercedes-Benz C-Class, Chevy Cruze, and Nissan Frontier.

➤ **What's a VelociRaptor 600,** you ask? It's a package from Hennessey Performance for the '15 Ford F-150 FX4. The supercharged upgrade nets you 600 horses via the 2.9L supercharger system, badging, embroidered headrests, and more.

➤ **The International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association's 2015 Report on Tolling** in the U.S. found that the number of road trips involving going on toll roads has risen 14 percent in the last four years (that's 5 billion trips in 2011 and 5.7 billion in 2015). And there's an increase in miles traveled on the tolls, up 9 percent (5,431 in 2011 to more than 5,932 in 2013). The top toll agency by mileage? Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

➤ **Butler County, Pennsylvania,** hosted the 2015 Bantam Jeep Heritage Festival and managed to break a Guinness World Record for largest parade of Jeeps. The number was 2,420, in case you want to attempt to break that.



➤ **Samsung's Safety Truck** is all about making it easier for us to see what's ahead of a semi-trailer truck. It has a wireless camera



➤ **Pricing for the '15 Ram Rebel?** Starting at \$42,790.

➤ **It'll be called the Nissan Stadium,** if you go see the Tennessee Titans in Nashville.

➤ **Chrysler was founded in 1925.** That would make 90 years in 2015.

➤ **Mercedes-Benz looks to be** putting its G 500 4x4-2 into production.

➤ **Young drivers fear other** drivers being dangerous more than spiders. That's according to research by Penn Schoen Berland via Ford. So, to recap what scares millennials and Generation Z: scary drivers, public speaking, death, spiders, and snakes. Which conditions freak them out most? Icy roads, tight parking spaces, backing onto a busy street, blind spots, and having no clue where they're going.

➤ **Theft Alarm Notification:** That's a newbie feature to On-Star's Stolen Vehicle Assistance, which will give you real-time alerts when your alarm goes off.



on the front and monitors are located on the back of the truck, allowing you to see even at night. The prototype proved the technology works, but now further testing begins.

➤ **Guess what's officially back in** California? The black-and-white license plates, circa '50s-'70s. The '60s Legacy Plate can be had for any model year auto, trailer, commercial vehicle, or motorcycle. Go to dmv.ca.gov for more info.



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IS IT TRUE?

➤ Is the Unimog coming back to Canada?

➤ Fiat Chrysler Automobiles is going to invest about \$280 mil into Fiat India Automobiles Private Limited, with Tata Motors Limited, for production of a new Jeep, with

production beginning in 2017?

➤ Uber drivers and riders can't carry a gun?

➤ A convertible SUV from Mercedes-Benz?



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE INDUSTRY

➤ Boria is joining forces with Alphabet Energy, which deals in thermoelectrics for waste heat recovery. They're planning to bring to market the first aftermarket thermoelectric fuel-efficiency product for vehicle internal combustion engines. The thinking is that Boria's exhaust systems and Alphabet Energy's PowerModule thermoelectric generator might be able to capture 5 to 10 percent of a vehicle's waste heat and then be able to reduce alternator loads or junk the alternator completely.



'16 model year. Among the burly items are the special front bumper, auxiliary lighting, raised air intake, 3-inch DualSport suspension, two wheel options, painted grille and rear bumper, badging,



➤ Guess what's at AEV dealerships? The AEV Prospector for the Ram! Place your order for the



and more. The package starts at \$13,925.

➤ Jeep-parts maker Omix-ADA has one dope Jeep collection and just keeps adding to it, including these two specimens: '78 J-10 and '59 FC-150 cab forward pickup. Check it out at jeepcollection.com. There are various military and civilian rigs.

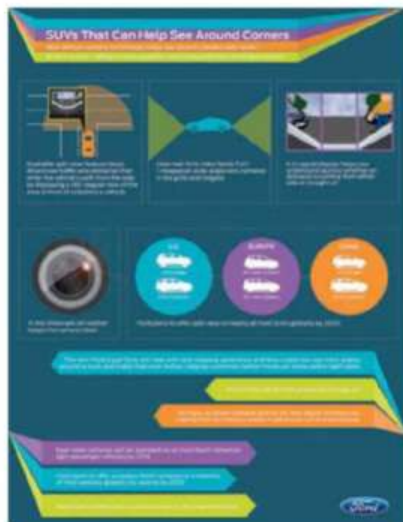
➤ Design Engineering has hit 20 years.

➤ ATC Truck Covers has an all-new website: atctruckcovers.com.

➤ Hella has a new website: myhellalights.com. Learn about lights. Also, wiper blades.

YOUR GOVERNMENT AT WORK

➔ In Connecticut, it's now the law to require dealerships to give buyers a written statement that it's illegal for manufacturers or dealers to void a warranty or deny coverage if aftermarket or recycled parts were already installed on the new vehicle or if someone other than the dealer did the deed.



Ford Super Duty Gets See-Around-Corners Camera

The newest camera safety technology coming to Ford vehicles? A split-view camera to help you see obstacles or traffic from the side. It's on the '16 Explorer in the U.S. and China. Meanwhile the new Super Duty will have up to seven cameras. For comparison, the '16 F-150 has up to five available.



Toyota's Off-Road Minivan?

The Toyota Ultimate Utility Vehicle is a custom Sienna minivan atop a Tacoma. It's for the North America Expedition, the second part of the automaker's Five Continents Driving Project. Leg 1 was Australia. You can follow the expedition at toyotaeverbetter.com.

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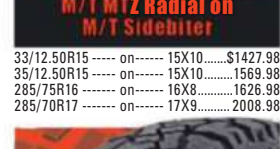
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HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

If you're old-school, Yamaha colors will always be yellow and black. To pay homage to its roots, Yamaha is offering its '16 lineup in the bumble-bee scheme, including the insanely popular YFZ450R quad. With stuff like a 2.9-gallon fuel tank, electronic fuel injection, a long-travel suspension with reservoir shocks, and disc brakes, the '16 YFZ450R would've seemed like the stuff of science fiction back in 1956. Be sure to check Yamaha's full '16 line of motorcycles, quads, and side-by-sides. **INFO:** Yamaha, yamahamotorsports.com



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Not everybody runs a high-pressure fuel-injection system, but what are you supposed to do if you've got a high-performance carbureted system with a high-volume electric or mechanical fuel pump? If you feed the carburetor too much pressure you can jam the needle and seats, flood the bowl, or cause any other number of issues. Aeromotive now has a solution in its new high-performance Ultra Low Pressure Regulator (PN 13222). It's adjustable for pressure between 1½ to 5 psi, which works perfectly for most side-draft carburetors.

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JACK BOLT

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EASTERN MOUNTAINS

A week-long 4WD adventure

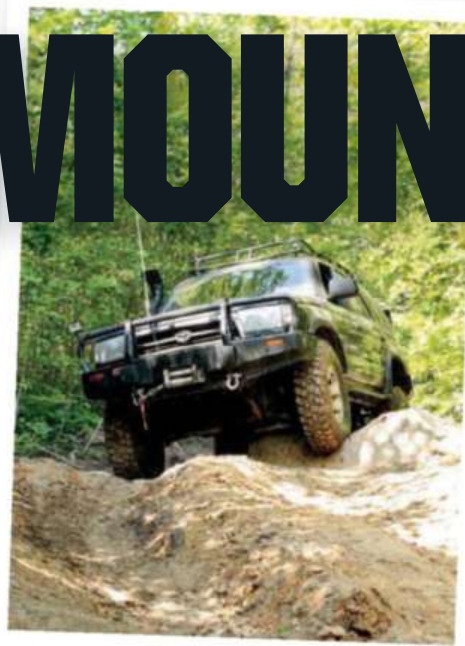
By Jay Kopycinski editor@fourwheeler.com Photography: Jay Kopycinski

SPRING SEASON IN THE SOUTHEAST IS ALWAYS A GOOD TIME FOR A WHEELING ADVENTURE. THE COLD, sleet, and ice have cleared. Then comes warmer temperatures and spring rains. For us, it was time to hit the trails again and do some exploring. But this wasn't a simple day trip but a weeklong adventure with 13 rigs that would cover nearly 800 miles.

Though many in the group had traveled hundreds of miles to get here, we stamped Seneca, South Carolina, as the start of our week. The group, known as the Florida Adventure Rigs, was vehicularly diverse. Each in the group drove the entire trip and carried all the gear needed to camp each night while we ventured from place to place.

On Day One, we dropped into Southeast Overland, a 4WD shop run by Steve Springs. Southeast Overland specialize most in outfitting rigs for overlanding and the kind of camping and wheeling trip we were on. Some in our group picked up recovery equipment in hopes it would stave off the need for vehicle extraction on this trip, but that remained to be seen.

We hit the highway and in a matter of hours had been through the Carolinas, Georgia, and



➔ On Day Two we were deep in Adventure Off Road Park in south-central Tennessee. We covered green and blue-rated trails. Matt Simpson ascends one of the hills in his mildly modified '96 4Runner.



MOUNTAIN WHEELING



🔥 Heavy rains the week before our trip left much of this area very wet. Here, Jary McNeil's '87 solid-axle-swapped Toyota truck crawls through one of the sloppy mud holes we encountered where the deep end could swallow 35-inch tires.

🔥 The rains had not missed Pickett State Forest, and we explored some of the waterlogged routes. One of two H3 Hummers we had on our run was Mark Wells' '09 Alpha, here pushing a wake of brown water.



🔥 Once in Pickett in northeastern Tennessee, we found some offshoots with tight trees as Greg Rice found out trying to thread his big GMC truck through the forest. Richard Potter, a local member of Big South Fork Off Road, was our helpful guide for the day.



🔥 AOP has a wide variety of trails from dirt roads to tight forest trails, plus rocky hills with huge boulders and ledges. Mike Marrero, our trip planner and leader, ran his '99 Nissan Frontier up one of the rocky slopes in Area 51, a black-diamond play area.

🔥 Steve Cegielski lays down the throttle in his '08 Jeep JK to push his way through some snotty mud on our way near Blackhouse Mountain. We followed the trail to a mountainside view called Wagon Gap Overlook.



Tennessee, ending near the small town of South Pittsburgh, Tennessee. Here lies Adventure Off Road Park (AOP), a 500-acre tract of land situated in the mountains of south-central Tennessee. Though relatively small in size, the owners are making good use of the land to provide a wide variety of trails.

We dropped tents in a large grassy area within AOP and played on the trails for the next day or so. The fee-to-play park offers easy, moderate, and difficult trails, and we tried some of each. Despite heavy rains before we got there, we were treated to nearly clear skies and awesome weather.

We played on elevation changes in the lush woods and found water crossings in the low areas. The terrain was a combination of loose dirt and rocky outcroppings. For those looking for fairly extreme challenges, they were there to be had. We had many days ahead of us and a lot more miles in our adventure, so we had fun but didn't push our mechanical limits against the trails.

Day Three found us moving again as we

traveled north towards Jamestown, Tennessee, and the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, which spans nearly 120,000 acres along the beautiful Cumberland Plateau. We found our next camping spot at Bandy Creek Campground. This area offers all kinds of outdoor activities in the forest and on the waterways. If you're also into canoeing or kayaking, you'll find even more fun here.

Our local dirt destination was Pickett State Forest. We explored deep into the wooded trails, finding some substantial mud in places. Again, it didn't pour on us, but the trails were well soaked from previous rains. We found some challenging climbs and rock ledges, accompanied by some truly scenic views.

Rising on Day Five, we checked over our rigs, broke camp, and then jumped back on pavement heading east. Near Sharps Chapel lies one of the last operating auto ferries in eastern Tennessee. The Helms Ferry was constructed in 1936 to transport local residents between the small communities scattered along the Powell River. We made the crossing

in several trips and enjoyed nostalgic passage as a small tugboat chugged the rusty barge across the water.

Following the backroads of Tennessee, we skirted Knoxville and crossed the Tennessee River, headed to Jeepism. Born by seven-slot addicts, Jeepism is a quaint Jeep-centric shop selling accessories and equipment to like-minded outdoor adventurers. The Jeepers in our group indulged here and all of us enjoyed the short stop.

Just down the highway is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We spent time exploring this area, spotting deer, turkey, bears, and other wildlife on the small backroads. As we explored, we turned onto Parson Branch. It's marked as a primitive road with 4WD recommended, but it was a dirt road in our book. However, it was dripping with vibrant scenery, and we didn't have a single regret making this forest trek.

We popped out of the wet forest onto Highway 129 just a bit north of Deals Gap and in the middle of the Tail of the Dragon, a twisty



Chris Conners made his first long road trip in his recently completed '01 Nissan Frontier. He had no problem climbing the Pickett obstacles with 1-ton axles and 37-inch tires.



We took the Helms Ferry across Powell River in Tennessee. This '36 auto ferry has shuttled local inhabitants across the water for nearly 80 years. Our crew took the ride across with a small, vintage tugboat propelling us from shore to shore.



In Townsend, Tennessee, we stopped into Jeepism, a specialty shop specializing in—you guessed it—Jeep stuff. We swapped a few quick stories with the proprietors about where we'd been and where we were headed.

In Pickett, we'd follow mild dirt trails for a while and then be challenged with a large ledge or other obstacle from time to time. Terri Brendle eases her JK Wrangler down one of the ledges.

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piece of pavement that throws out 318 curves in just 11 miles. It's a popular spot for motorcyclists and sports car enthusiasts, so we got fairly odd looks when we rolled down the serpent in 13 4x4s in all shapes and sizes.

It was still Day Five, and we were trying to find our way near Murphy, North Carolina. We headed up a mountain, then around a mountain. It rained, and we went down a mountain. Those that wander, are not lost. It rained some more and we took longer than expected to get to our evening destination. Again, we were not lost. We pulled in after dark, but the host at Crawford's Campground was cordial and welcomed us. We'd camped here before and can certainly recommend this place if you're visiting the area.

After a long day, we were met with clearing skies and another comfortable evening. The conversation at the campfire was enthusiastic as we recounted all we had seen and done that day. On the next day, morning would break and we were up for another day in the dirt. It was here we would seek out our second

So You Wanna Overland?

Completing a trip such as this may not be an easy task, but it can be very rewarding. It takes a good bit of planning to do a trip of this length with this number of rigs, however, and none of our trip was prerun save for some Internet mapping. As such, everyone knew we were treading new ground, so route mistakes and back-tracking could likely happen. We just all went with the flow of the day.

Drivers are often tempted to try hard obstacles that challenge their skills and the mechanical limits of their rig. Being prudent and knowing when to back down is important. Spare parts, extra fuel, and tools are needed either individually or spread across the group. You will need to keep your vehicle running its own power for the whole of the trip.

The group can decide on the level of camping comfort needed, whether that be a week of remote, dry camping versus luxurious private campgrounds, or something in between. We made periodic, coordinated stops to refuel and restock perishables every few days.

Every day was not about wheeling all day. We had plenty of time in the dirt but also took some scenic byways and stopped at interesting sites along the way. If this sounds fun, then plan your own adventure!

private park, Durhamtown Tellico in western North Carolina. This area lost a lot of 4WD traffic when the popular Upper Tellico OHV area was closed in 2009. Local businesses suffered for some years. Now Durhamtown is trying to change that since it opened up about a year before we arrived.

We headed into the 3,000-acre Durhamtown park after checking in and struck out on the Plane Crash Trail. The route is a shelf trail for much of its distance, skirting a mountainside and then climbing higher on the Ridge Trail to Buzzard's Roost Overlook for a grand view of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. Wind-

ing through the park, we stopped for the short hike into Mulky Falls, where water tumbles 40 feet off a cliff.

Continuing to the far end of the park, we found The Bowl, a challenging rockcrawling play area comprised of large rock outcroppings and huge slabs. We played here, attempting what we dared and managed to leave without carnage. We explored other routes in the park while working our way back to the entrance. The terrain was diverse, offering something for every skill level. This concluded a fun Day Six.

On Day Seven, we awoke to realize our adventure was coming to a solemn close and

it was near time to part ways to head for home. We all agreed it had been an awesome week of camaraderie and 4WD adventure. We'll do it again. **FW**

G Some of the climbs in The Bowl area were deceptively short on traction. Aaron Arnold had to get some momentum to get his '07 JK Wrangler to the top of this slick slab.

U Once we ventured to The Bowl, more serious rockcrawling began. Tim Lowry inched and bounced his '98 Jeep TJ up one of the steep bowl faces. The mix of the smooth rock and wet dirt made finding traction difficult.



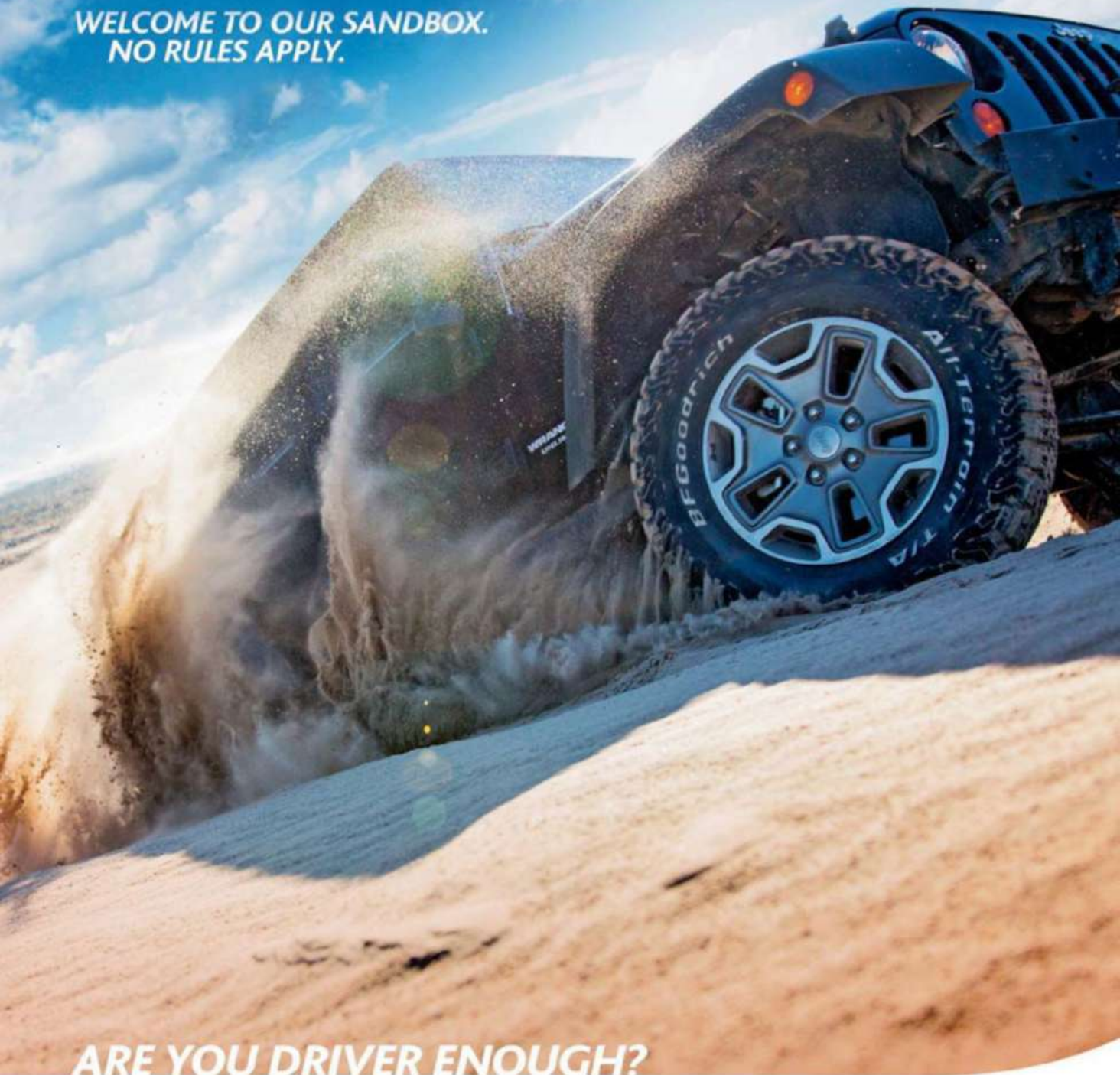
G Durhamtown Tellico has been open about a year and continues to develop new trails. Robert Keller led us down the Plane Crash trail, a mountain ledge route that climbs in elevation. The trail is named for the site of a single-engine plane that crashed and remains in the trees below the trail.



G The big rock slabs in the bowl area were little challenge to James Gill in his Hummer H3T, assuming he had the real estate to turn his long-wheelbase truck around.



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YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN! NOT LONG AGO WE COMPILED info on 31 rigs submitted by their owners and we asked you to cast your vote for which 10 of these awesome Top Truck Challenge 2015 hopefuls would make the trek to Hollister, California, for our giant, weeklong, seven-event off-road thrashfest. You responded with an avalanche of ballots and we tallied the votes. The Top 10 vote-getting rigs were notified that they had been given the nod by you and were invited to compete in the 23rd running of Top Truck Challenge, better known as TTC. As usual, we also included two alternates in case up to 2 of the 10 competitors couldn't make it, and that's exactly what happened this year.

Of the 31 TTC hopefuls, 14 were GM vehicles, 4 were



Jeep, 4 were Ford, 2 were Toyota, and 2 were Suzuki. There was also one each of International Harvester, Dodge, Fiat, Land Rover, and Nissan. You voted in seven GM vehicles, the Dodge, one of the Fords, and the International. The Dodge and Ford owners declined to compete a few days prior to the event. The alternate rigs, a Toyota and a GM, were activated, thus solidifying the field. For the third consecutive year you rejected Jeep vehicles, which marks only the third time in TTC history that Jeep vehicles have been absent from the event. Four of the competitors you voted in came from Canada, three from the state of Oregon, and one each from Idaho, Wyoming, and California. Slightly over half of the 10 rigs were big-block-powered and almost half were sporting 2½-ton Rockwell axles.

RS

A look at the 10 incredible rigs, and drivers, of Top Truck Challenge 2015

By Ken Brubaker ken.brubaker@fourwheeler.com Photography: Ken Brubaker & John Cappa



In a previous story we showed you a reader-submitted photo and gave you a basic overview of each rig. In this story, we'll delve deeper into each rig and provide the lowdown on everything from axles to engines to interiors. Each rig has changed to some degree since you voted 'em in (a vehicle is allowed to be modified prior to competition as long as it resembles the rig the reader submitted and adheres to the rules), and the way you see the rigs here is exactly the way they entered competition. Look for even more info on these rigs in upcoming issues.

These rigs don't magically create a strategy and drive themselves, so this is why we're including information about each talented driver. We sent each driver a few questions and are including the answers to some of those questions within each feature. This will offer you a glimpse into the thought process of each driver.

In next month's issue of *Four Wheeler*, we'll publish the huge, detailed event story. You'll see incredible photos and read all the fascinating details of how each competitor did in all seven of TTC's gnarly events. For now, read on to get to know the TTC 2015 competitors and their rigs.





1

1. Furlong's Scout still has some IH DNA, including the chassis and the reverse-opening hood. Outside, equipment includes a pair of KC HiLites driving lights, front and rear inner fender lights, and a front-mounted Smittybilt XRC 9,500-pound winch with VooDoo winch rope. The rig rolls on a set of 54-inch tires mounted to 10-inch-wide double beadlock wheels. Inside, there's a custom rollcage, a pair of Scat Enterprises Procar suspension seats with four-point safety harnesses, stock gauge cluster from a Cummins-powered truck, and a collection of Auto Meter gauges.

2. Furlong estimates that the 5.9L 6BT turbodiesel powerplant generates 400 hp and 800 lb-ft of torque. Among other things, the engine has a custom intake, 100hp injectors, 4,000-rpm governor spring kit, AMSOIL lube, and an exhaust stack on the '04 Cummins turbo. The engine is fed by a RCI fuel cell with Russell lines and cooled by a rear-mount radiator fit with a Flex-a-lite electric fan. A pair of rear-mounted Optima batteries (in TMR boxes) helps to create amperage for electrical needs. Power is transferred through a TorqueFlite 727 automatic transmission that has a mild shift kit, Flex-a-lite cooler, and AMSOIL fluid.

3. Both of the AMSOIL-lubed AxleTech 4000 axles have pneumatic lockers, hydraulic steering with AMSOIL fluid, and EMF rams and ball sockets (the rear-steer uses a Kamikaze Customs self-centering system). Custom rotors, along with calipers pirated from a '10 Duramax-equipped Silverado, handle braking. Power is carried from the relocked and AMSOIL-lubed NP205 to the axles via custom driveshafts with 1410 U-joints. The front and rear suspension is a three-link radius arm setup with Currie and Trail-Gear joints along with Profender 16-inch-travel remote-reservoir coilovers, 16-inch-travel bypass shocks, and 4-inch-travel bumpstops.

Furlong Scout

A Cummins-powered International Harvester Scout with AxleTech 4000 axles is an interesting combination, and it's no wonder you voted it into TTC 2015. Owner Adam Furlong says that he has built "most of this truck, with some help from few good friends," over the course of 10 years. Now it's time to put the rig to the ultimate test.



2



3

THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Adam Furlong/Pemberton, British Columbia, Canada
Occupation: Mechanic
Vehicle model: '79 International Harvester Scout II
Engine: Cummins 5.9L I-6 turbodiesel
Transmission: TF727
Transfer case(s): NP205
Suspension (f/r): Radius arm three-link, 16-in-travel Profender remote-reservoir coilovers, 16-in-travel Profender bypass shocks, Profender 4-in-travel bumpstops/radius arm three-link, 16-in-travel Profender remote-reservoir coilovers, 16-in-travel Profender bypass shocks, Profender 4-in-travel bumpstops
Axles (f/r): AxleTech 4000, pneumatic locker, custom disc brakes, hydraulic steering/AxleTech 4000, pneumatic locker, custom disc brakes, hydraulic steering
Axle ratio: 1.93:1 (ring-and-pinion), 3.50:1 (planetary hubs), 6.80:1 (final)
Wheels: 20x10 double beadlock
Tires: 19.5/54-20LT Interco Super Swamper TSL Bogger

Adam Speaks

Most looking forward to: "Tank Trap. I have always liked the Tank Trap because it takes driver skill and a well-built rig just to finish."

Not looking forward to: "I'm looking forward to all of the events."

One thing you should know: "I always want more power, whether it's a car, truck, dirt bike, or snowmobile. Really, anything with a motor. I have a hard time leaving anything stock—I like to make horsepower!"

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Ryan's K10

Ryan Agan purchased this '83 K10 in 2009 when he was a senior in high school. Over the years the rig has had three different engines, five different transmissions, four different transfer case setups, three different front axles, and four different rear axles. Last year, Ryan was an alternate at Top Truck Challenge. This year, you gave him the nod.

1. The front of the K10 has been narrowed a total of 12 inches and the rear has been narrowed 14 inches. The bed has also been shortened 6 inches behind the wheels. Other exterior mods include radiused fenders and bedsides, custom half-doors, custom rock sliders, a front-mounted Warn 9.5cti winch, rear Warn 4,000-pound winch (to draw down the rear axle), four LED headlights, and a 50-inch LED roof-mounted lightbar. The interior includes a trick custom rollcage, removable steering wheel, and an array of Auto Meter gauges.

2. The WFO-trussed Chevy Dana 60 front axle has been moved 8 inches forward from stock and includes Reid Racing knuckles, a Dana 70 carrier and cryogenically treated 4.56 gears, RCV axleshafts, a Detroit Locker, and AMSOIL gear oil. The hydraulic steering system includes a PSC ram and Offroad Design arms. The 14-bolt rear axle has been moved

2 inches rearward from stock and includes a Pacific Fabrication truss, Revolution Gear & Axle 4.56 gears, welded spider gears, and AMSOIL gear oil. The front and rear suspension consist of a triangulated four-link setup with MetalCloak Duroflex joints and ORI STX 16-inch-travel struts. South Bay Driveline driveshafts sprout from the NP203/205 Offroad Design Doubler T-case setup that uses AMSOIL fluid.

3. Nestled between the frametrails is a fuel-injected GM LQ9 6.0L V-8 that generates 450 hp and 500

lb-ft of torque. Some of its features include Tilden valvesprings and trunnion bearings, Sanderson headers, Flowmaster muffler, and 3-inch exhaust. The engine is cooled by an aluminum radiator with dual electric fans; electrical needs are handled by a Pacific Fabrication engine harness and dual Optima RedTop batteries; and AMSOIL is the lube of choice. Fuel is drawn from a 19-gallon aluminum fuel cell. Bolted to the engine is a heavily built TH400 transmission with Tilden pan, AMSOIL fluid, and Derale cooler with 10-inch fan.



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Ryan Speaks

Most looking forward to: "The Tank Trap! It has always been the biggest and baddest event in TTC!"

Not looking forward to: "Frame Twister. It's pretty easy to do some damage in that event!"

One thing you should know: "I will do what it takes to help out my fellow competitors."

THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Ryan Agan/Hollister, California

Occupation: Fabrication/technician

Vehicle model: '83 Chevy K10

Engine: GM 6.0L V-8

Transmission: TH400

Transfer case(s): NP203/205, Offroad Design Doubler

Suspension (f/r): Triangulated four-link, ORI STX

16-in-travel struts/triangulated four-link, ORI STX

16-in-travel struts

Axles (f/r): Chevy Dana 60, Jantz Engineering Jana

76 kit, RCV axleshafts, hydraulic steering, PSC ram,

WFO truss/14-bolt, welded spider gears, Pacific

Fabrication truss

Axle ratio: 4.56:1

Wheels: 17x12 Stazworks double beadlock

Tires: 43x14.50-17LT Interco TLS SX

Eric's K2500

A rig like Eric Kam's Chevy K2500 doesn't happen overnight. As a matter of fact, Eric says it has taken about 10 years to get the truck to where it is today. And where it is today is poised to challenge Top Truck's seven gnarly events because you voted it in. Eric seems more than ready to unleash the big-block, Rockwells, and 54s.

1. The backbone of the truck is a boxed and shortened K2500 chassis. The sheetmetal is almost all modified, either by trees or a Sawzall, Eric says. The rig rolls on 54-inch tires mounted on custom 14-inch-wide double beadlock wheels. A Superwinch 15,500-pound Tiger Shark winch is at the ready up front. Inside, equipment includes a pair of plastic race seats, Joes Racing steering wheel, several Auto Meter gauges, and a custom rollcage.

2. Welded spider gears and AMSOIL gear oil reside in the 2½-ton Rockwell axles, and each axle also has Ouwerson axleshafts, a custom pinion brake, and a PSC ram for the hydraulic steering. Each axle is located by triangulated four-link bars with EMF spherical rod ends. An ORI remote-reservoir strut resides at each corner and the front struts have 16 inches of travel, while the rear struts have 18 inches of travel. A NorthWest

FabWorks BlackBox underdrive is located between the transmission and NP205 T-case. A pair of 1410-jointed Xtreme Driveline driveshafts carry power to the axles.

3. The 496ci big-block engine is said to produce 600 hp and 600 lb-ft of torque. The 'plant has forged pistons, a Comp Cams camshaft, Edelbrock RPM Air-Gap intake, FAST fuel injection, MSD ignition, Sanderson headers, Borla mufflers, and AMSOIL lube. Cooling the engine is a Griffin aluminum radiator with electric fan and pump. Mated

to the engine is a TH400 transmission with manual valvebody and AMSOIL fluid. The transmission is cooled by a "tractor cooler."



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THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Eric Kam/Red Deer, Alberta, Canada
Occupation: Engineer
Vehicle model: '85 Chevy K2500
Engine: GM 496ci V-8
Transmission: TH400
Transfer case(s): NorthWest FabWorks BlackBox/ NP205
Suspension (f/r): Triangulated four-link, EMF spherical rod ends, 16-in-travel ORI remote-reservoir struts/triangulated four-link, EMF spherical rod ends, 18-in-travel ORI remote-reservoir struts
Axles (f/r): 2½-ton Rockwell, welded spiders, hydraulic steering, custom pinion brake/2½-ton Rockwell, welded spiders, hydraulic steering, custom pinion brake
Axle ratio: 6.72:1
Wheels: 20x14 custom double beadlock
Tires: 19.5/54x-20LT Interco Super Swamper TSL Bogger

Eric Speaks

Most looking forward to: "Tank Trap. Hardest obstacle, and it's what we're used to here in Canada."

Not looking forward to: "Nothing. Should be fun."

One thing you should know: "I have a baby due a week after TTC, if it ain't early."



1

1. Exterior mods include narrowed front and rear sheetmetal as well as generous fender trimming to allow the 47-inch tires on Rhino Fabrication beadlock wheels room to move without contacting the sheetmetal. Other exterior mods include a pair of Rigid Industries lights and a front-mounted Smit-tybilt 9,500-pound winch with VooDoo winch rope. What you can't see are the front frame mods designed to create room for the Rockwell axle and the rollage stiffeners between the framerrails. Interior equipment includes a pair of RCI seats, G-Force harnesses, GT steering wheel, custom aluminum console, and an array of Auto Meter gauges.

2. The 427ci big-block engine is said to produce 550 hp at 6,000 rpm and 550 lb-ft of torque at 4,500 rpm. The engine's equipment includes Speedpro pistons, L-88 heads, an Edelbrock Performer RPM intake, FAST fuel injection, custom headers, and a dual 3-inch exhaust with Magnaflo mufflers. The 'plant is lubed by AM-SOIL and cooled by a four-core aluminum radiator with 16-inch Maradyne electric fan. A 100-amp alternator and Interstate 1,100 cca battery help to meet electrical needs. Power is routed through a TH400 transmission that includes a TransGo manual shift kit, B&M cooler with Maradyne fan, and AMSOIL fluid.

3. Both of the 2½-ton Rockwell axles have welded spider gears, DIY4X pinion brakes, AMSOIL gear oil, and hydraulic steering. The axles internals are spun by owner-fabbed driveshafts with 1410 U-joints. The rig's unique suspension system is a Boomerang cantilever/double-triangulated four-link setup that includes 12-inch-travel Profender coilovers and 16-inch-travel air shocks. There's also a quartet of limit straps and a pair of Profender bumpstops. An NP205 T-case filled with AMSOIL fluid splits power to the driveshafts.

Dan's GMC

We can't say we're surprised that you gave Dan Osterhout's '70 GMC pickup the thumbs-up to compete in TTC 2015. This rig is not only based on a timeless classic body style, but it also has a fascinating collection of serious parts like a big-block engine and 2½-ton Rockwell axles. Now we'll see how it fares in the evil Tank Trap.



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THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Dan Osterhout/Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Occupation: Superintendent

Vehicle model: '70 GMC pickup

Engine: GM 427ci V-8

Transmission: TH400

Transfer case(s): NP205

Suspension (f/r): Boomerang cantilever, double triangulated, Profender 12-in-travel coilovers, 16-in-travel air shocks/Boomerang cantilever, double triangulated, Profender 12-in-travel coilovers, 16-in-travel air shocks, Profender bumpstops

Axles (f/r): 2½-ton Rockwell, welded spiders, hydraulic steering, DIY4X pinion brake/2½-ton Rockwell, welded spiders, hydraulic steering, DIY4X pinion brake

Axle ratio: 6.72:1

Wheels: 16.5x12 Rhino Fabrication beadlock

Tires: 17/47-16.5LT Interco Super Swamper LTB

Dan Speaks

Most looking forward to: "Coal Chute because it looks challenging to driving skill and vehicle limitation."

Not looking forward to: "Mud Pit because that's the kind of thing I wheel in now."

One thing you should know: "I have no other hobbies but fabricating and four-wheeling. Just ask my fiancée."

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1. Big 54-inch Mickey Thompson Baja Claw TTC tires are mated to Hutchinson double beadlock wheels with custom BTOR wheel inserts. But there's a lot more. Among other things there's a MC Welding front bumper and winch mount, BTOR rocker replacement sliders and rear bumper, and Wicked Tube Fab fenders. Also, a trick front-mounted custom BTOR dual geartrain Warn 8274 winch with two 6 hp motors and VooDoo winch rope and a rear-mounted Engo USA 10,000-pound winch with VooDoo winch rope. Interior mods include Corbeau suspension seats and a full rollcage that ties into the engine/suspension 'cage.

2. Among other things, the 350ci V-8 has a TBI spacer, custom-tuned chip by 208 Motorsports, ported '94 Chevy truck exhaust manifolds, '96 K1500-sourced gear reduction starter, and AMSOIL lube. Dual 140-amp alternators (with twin resettable circuit breakers) work in conjunction with a pair of Odyssey PC1500 batteries to generate electrical power. Bolted to the engine is a BTOR-built TH400 transmission that includes a custom transmission case to strengthen the tailhousing, AMSOIL fluid, and BorgWarner clutches.

3. AxleTech 4000 axles are located fore and aft, and both are fit with the factory pneumatic locker, custom BTOR disc brakes hydro-assist steering, and AMSOIL gear oil. The axles internals are spun by a pair of Tom Wood's driveshafts. The rig's front suspension consists of a spherical rod-ended five-link with F-O-A remote-reservoir 16-inch-travel coilovers, 4-inch-travel bumpstops, and 20-inch limit straps. The rear includes military-wrapped 54-inch leafs and Doetsch Tech Prerunner 14-inch-travel shocks. The rig uses a custom BTOR 231 gearbox with 2.72:1 ratio and a GM NP205 T-case that was modified by BTOR with 32 spline outputs. Both components use AMSOIL lube.

Christopher's Jimmy

Christopher Bowman owns Bowman Transmission and Off Road (BTOR) and his '88 GMC Jimmy has undergone a few changes since you voted it into Top Truck 2015. One thing that Christopher didn't change is the bone-stock 100,000-mile-plus 350ci V-8 engine. Will the old engine grenade or help carry the truck to an impressive overall finish?



THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Christopher Bowman/Mountain Home, Idaho

Occupation: Owner, Bowman Transmission and Off Road, LLC.

Vehicle model: '88 GMC Jimmy

Engine: GM 350ci V-8

Transmission: TH400

Transfer case(s): BTOR 231 gearbox, NP205

Suspension (f/r): Five-link, F-O-A 16-in-travel remote-reservoir coilovers, 4-in-travel F-O-A bumpstops, F-O-A 20-in limit straps/54-in leaf springs with military wrap, Doetsch Tech Prerunner 14-in-travel shocks

Axles (f/r): AxleTech 4000, factory pneumatic locker, BTOR hydro-assist steering and disc brakes/AxleTech 4000, factory pneumatic locker, BTOR disc brakes

Axle ratio: 1.93:1 (ring-and-pinion), 3.5:1 (planetary hubs), 6.80:1 (final)

Wheels: 20x12 Hutchinson double beadlock

Tires: 19.5/54-20LT Mickey Thompson Baja Claw TTC

Christopher Speaks

Most looking forward to: "Not sure I have a favorite event—I want to do them all and hopefully complete them. Each one has their own challenges for me as a driver, challenges for my rig, and challenges for my co-driver."

Not looking forward to: "Doesn't really apply to me, as I look forward to them all! Pretty bummed the word on the street is there is no mud again this year due to the drought. I wouldn't have placed well with a heavy rig and stock horsepower, but it would have been a blast."

One thing you should know: "Move along, there's nothing to see here."

Kimberly's GMC

Does this truck look familiar? It should because it has appeared at Top Truck twice previously. The first time was in 2010 when Jason Gray drove it to a win in the Truck Class, and the second time was when Jason drove it in the 2012 Top Truck Champions Challenge. This year, Jason's wife, Kimberly, takes the wheel of the rig with Jason as spotter.

1. All of the rig's body mounts were relocated 3 inches higher on the chassis, and from the firewall forward is a custom tube chassis. The front and rear of the body has been narrowed, the fender openings enlarged, and a pair of square-tube rock sliders are welded to the cab floor. The truck rolls on 54-inch Mickey Thompson Baja Claw TTCs mounted to Stazworks double beadlock wheels. Other exterior features include custom tube doors by Grayfab, front-mounted Warn 9.5ti winch, and a rear-mounted Warn 3,000-pound winch with VooDoo winch rope. Inside is a pair of Ford Escort GT seats, a Grant steering wheel, and a collection of Auto Meter gauges.

2. A pair of 2½-ton Rockwell axles reside under the truck, and both are equipped with Ouverson Violator axleshafts and filled with AMSOIL gear

oil. The front axle has Holden On Motorsports disc brakes, the factory locker, and PSC hydraulic steering, while the rear axle uses a pinion brake and a spool. The four-link suspension system includes RuffStuff spherical rod ends and mounts, F-O-A 16-inch-travel coilovers, and F-O-A 4-inch-travel bumpstops. An AMSOIL-lubed NP203/205 T-case setup with 32-spline outputs splits power to the axles, and it's carried by custom driveshafts. The driveshafts are painted yellow because "all badass trucks have yellow drivelines."

3. Under the hood is a propane-fueled 454ci V-8 that is said to produce a "couple hundred... maybe" horsepower. The engine has dual exhaust with Flowmaster mufflers, a MSD Street Fire distributor, Accel plug wires, and AMSOIL lube. Fuel is drawn from a pair of 8-gallon forklift propane tanks. The engine is cooled by the stock radiator with custom shroud and a pair of electric fans. Helping to generate amperage is a pair of 900-cca truck batteries. Bolted to the big-block engine is a TH400 transmission with shift kit and AMSOIL fluid.



THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Kimberly Gray/Amity, Oregon
Occupation: Currently a stay at home mom.

Vehicle model: '75 GMC pickup

Engine: GM 454ci V-8

Transmission: TH400

Transfer case(s): NP203/205 Doubler, 32-spline outputs

Suspension (f/r): Four-link, RuffStuff spherical rod ends and mounts, F-O-A 16-in-travel coilovers and 4-in-travel bumpstops/four-link, RuffStuff spherical rod ends and mounts, F-O-A 16-in-travel coilovers and 4-in-travel bumpstops, Grayfab Top Hat, Currie Antirock sway bar

Axles (f/r): 2½-ton Rockwell, factory locker, Ouverson Violator axleshafts, Holden On Motorsports disc brakes/2½-ton Rockwell, factory locker, Ouverson Violator axleshafts, pinion brake, DIY4X covers

Axle ratio: 6.72:1

Wheels: 20x12 Stazworks double beadlock

Tires: 19.5/54-20LT Mickey Thompson Baja Claw TTC

Kimberly Speaks

Most looking forward to: "The Tank Trap because that seems to be what everyone talks about."

Not looking forward to: "Nothing really comes to mind."

One thing you should know: "I absolutely hate being in front of a camera!"



1. The front and rear body of Jeremy's Blazer has been narrowed, and there are custom rock sliders and larger wheel openings for the big 47-inch tires that are mounted to Why Not Customs Hummer beadlocks with Rogue Fabrication centers. Up front is a Dan Keller winch bumper that mounts a Warn 8274 winch with VooDoo winch rope. The rig has a massive custom 'cage,' and the interior includes a pair of race seats with safety harnesses, as well as an aftermarket steering wheel, custom Alex Sanders TTC shift knob, and a pair of rear-mounted propane tanks.

2. Under the hood is a propane-fired 454ci big-block that Jeremy says has stock internals. The engine has a Muffler Works exhaust, and the 'plant' is cooled by a front-mounted radiator with electric fan. Bolted to the engine is a Dan's Gears SM465 four-speed manual transmission.

3. The Dana 60 front axle includes Yukon chromoly 'shafts, Super Joints, a spool, and drive flanges. The axle is also fit with Revolution Gear & Axle 5.38 gears, a RuffStuff diff cover, and Reid Racing knuckles and Cs. Out back is a 14-bolt axle that includes Yukon chromoly axles, a Revolution spool and 5.38 gears, Ballistic Fabrication pinion yoke guard, Grayfab anti-wrap bar and disc brakes, and a RuffStuff diff cover. The hydro-assist steering system utilizes Redneck Ram and JH Offroad components. Both axles are fed by homemade driveshafts that use Tom Wood's Super-Flex joints. The Offroad Design-sourced NP205 T-case has a 32-spline conversion, and it's controlled by JB Custom Fabrication cable shifters. The front and rear suspension system is a simple leaf-spring setup with shocks.

Jeremy's Blazer

Jeremy Brown has a history with Top Truck Challenge. He has been on the recovery crew and has been trying to get voted in as a competitor. This year, you gave him his wish. He's coming to Hollister with his big-block-powered Blazer, and it's sporting some upgrades since you gave him the thumbs-up.



THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Jeremy Brown/Sherwood, Oregon
Occupation: Concrete technician
Vehicle model: '72 Chevy Blazer
Engine: GM 454ci V-8
Transmission: SM465
Transfer case(s): NP205
Suspension (f/r): Leaf springs, shocks/leaf springs, shocks, Grayfab anti-wrap bar
Axles (f/r): Dana 60, Yukon chromoly axleshafts, Yukon Super Joints, Yukon drive flanges, Redneck Ram hydro-assist, JH Offroad high-steer arm, Reid Racing knuckles and Cs, Yukon spool, RuffStuff diff cover/14-bolt, Yukon chromoly axles, Revolution Gear & Axle spool, Grayfab disc brakes and anti-wrap bar, Ballistic Fabrication pinion yoke guard, RuffStuff diff cover
Axle ratio: 5.38:1
Wheels: 16.5x8.5 Why Not Customs Hummer beadlock w/Rogue Fabrication center
Tires: 17/47-16.5LT Interco Super Swamper LTB

Jeremy Speaks

Most looking forward to: "Tank Trap. I really want to cross that finish line."

Not looking forward to: "Tow Test. That's a heavy truck to pull, and I don't wanna break before the Frame Twister."

One thing you should know: "Every time I go to Hollister I get poison oak really bad. Sucks, but it's worth the itching to be at TTC. And earthquakes are more fun when you're drunk. As for the submerged engine? S***lbuffout."

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Mike's Blazer

Since you last saw Mike Jaskolski's '76 Chevy Blazer, one of the things he has done is to increase the tire size from 44 inches to 47 inches. Add this to the truck's impressive list of equipment and it looks as though Mike is ready for Top Truck's seven nasty events. His 10-year build is about to go head-to-head with some serious terrain.

1. The front and rear of the Blazer has been narrowed, the rocker panels have been raised to improve ground clearance, the frame has been shortened, and the wheelbase extended to 116.5 inches. There's Offroad Design tube doors, a custom front bumper, a Warn 12,500-pound winch with VooDoo winch rope, video cameras front and rear, six forward-facing HID lights, a 50-inch LED lightbar, and four Rigid LED rock lights. The rig rolls on 47-inch tires on 12-inch-wide Stazworks double beadlock wheels. Interior mods include four seats, a Grant steering wheel, custom dash, Auto Meter gauges, and a custom 10-point rollcage.

2. Up front is a Dana 60 axle that includes a Dana 70 ring-and-pinion, RCV axleshafts and drive flanges, chromoly pinion yoke, 5.13:1 gears, ARB Air Locker, AMSOIL gear oil, and PSC steering ram.



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Out back is a 14-bolt axle that includes RCV axle-shafts, chromoly pinion yoke, TMR 14 Shave Kit, 5.13:1 gears, AMSOIL gear oil, and disc brakes with CNC cutting brakes. The three-link front suspension includes King 14-inch-travel remote-reservoir coilovers and bumpstops. The four-link rear suspension includes 16-inch-travel King coilover shocks and bumpstops. A LoMax 205 3:1 T-case and

AMSOIL-filled Offroad Design NP203/205 Doubler sends power to the Tom Wood's driveshafts.

3. Mike says the Holley-injected 555ci big-block Chevy engine produces 703 hp at the tires. Engine highlights include a Dart Big M block, aluminum heads, a 400hp nitrous system, and AMSOIL lube. Fuel is drawn from a 20-gallon Aeromotive fuel cell and custom 16-gallon reserve fuel tanks. Electrical needs are met in part by a 240-amp alternator and a pair of Optima RedTop batteries. The engine is cooled via a custom large radiator with electric fans. Power is sent to a built TH400 transmission that's filled with AMSOIL fluid.



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Mike Speaks

Most looking forward to: "I'm looking forward to the Mud Pit so I can spray the NOS on the 555ci Dart BBC. It looks like it has been a very dry year in California, so I'm taking a guess that with the lack of water the Mud Pit is not going to happen, so I have to go with the Mini Rubicon."

Not looking forward to: "Most definitely the logs on the Frame Twister! The past TTC event I watched the logs literally end the TTC event for some competitors and tear their rigs apart."

One thing you should know: "I'm out to have fun, but I do have a competitive side as all of us competitors will. Most importantly, it is the relationships and friends you meet on every journey that is important. I have never raced Thumper or been in a competition with Thumper so this will be all new to me. I will not let down the people that voted for me so Thumper will get driven hard, and if it breaks, I guess we will have to fix it! This will be an event my twin brother Robert and I will always remember, no matter what happens, and I am happy to be able to bring him along for the ride even though he is a Ford guy!"

THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Mike Jaskolski/Laramie, Wyoming
Occupation: Oilfield consultant
Vehicle model: '76 Chevy Blazer
Engine: GM 555ci V-8
Transmission: TH400
Transfer case(s): NP203/205 Offroad Design Doubler, JB Conversions LoMax 205 3:1
Suspension (f/r): Custom three-link, Summit Machine aluminum lower links, 14-in-travel King remote-reservoir coilover shocks, King bumpstops/custom four-link, Summit Machine aluminum lower links, 16-in-travel King remote-reservoir coilover shocks, King bumpstops
Axles (f/r): Dana 60, Jantz Engineering Jana 76 kit, RCV axle-shafts, ARB Air Locker, PSC hydraulic steering/14-bolt, TMR 14 Shave Kit, RVC axle-shafts, ARB Air Locker, disc brakes
Axle ratio: 5.13:1
Wheels: 16x12 Stazworks double beadlock
Tires: 47x21-16LT Pitbull Growler



Jake's Toyota

Jake Brazier's '86 Toyota pickup is the smallest rig with the smallest engine in the 2015 lineup of TTC competitors. That being said, Jake has lots of experience behind the wheel of his budget-built rig and knows the truck inside and out. Judging by the big-air photo he sent in with his entry form, we could be in for quite a show.

1. Jake says the metal work on the exterior of his Toyota was courtesy of trees and the tires hitting the body. Other exterior mods include a 1-inch body lift, "homemade junk" front bumper, Trail-Gear rock sliders, box tubing rear bumper, cowl hood with mind-game 350ci logo, rollbar, five "cheap, junky" auxiliary lights, a front-mounted 10,000-pound Smittybilt winch with VooDoo winch rope, and a rear-mounted 10,000-pound Superwinch winch. Putting power to the ground is a set of 44-inch tires

mounted to Stazworks double beadlock wheels. Inside the truck you'll find everything mostly stock with the exception of a rollcage fashioned from 1¾-inch DOM, Sony Xplod head unit, "\$5 6x9" speakers, and a collection of gauges that Jake says are "all different brands, all cheap junk."

2. Under the hood is a Toyota Supra-sourced 3.0L 7M-GTE turbocharged six-cylinder engine. Jake says it generates 300 hp at 5,600 rpm and 300 lb-ft of torque at 4,000 rpm. It has a divorced 3-inch-diameter down-pipe and AMSOIL lube, and it is cooled by a bed-mounted radiator with 16- and 12-inch Flex-a-lite electric fans and AMSOIL Dominator Coolant Boost. A pair of rear-mounted Interstate batteries helps to generate electrical power. Mated to the engine is an AMSOIL-lubed R154/R150 hybrid Toyota transmission.

3. The front axle is a Dodge Dana 60 and has RCV axleshafts, a spool, 7.17:1 gears, AMSOIL gear oil, and PSC hydraulic steering.

The axle's internals are turned by a square-tube front driveshaft. Out back is a Dodge Dana 70U axle and it has 7.17:1 gears, welded spider gears, AMSOIL gear oil, and ¾-ton Chevy rear brakes. The rear axle's internals are turned by a modified '98 Toyota CV driveshaft. Power is sent to the axles via a twin T-case setup consisting of dual Toyota transfer cases filled with AMSOIL fluid. Leaf springs and Bilstein shocks comprise the suspension. Note the creative use of old, retired road signs.



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THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Jake Brazier/Choiaceland, Saskatchewan, Canada

Occupation: Automotive service technician

Vehicle model: '86 Toyota pickup

Engine: Toyota 7M-GTE turbocharged I-6

Transmission: R154/R150 hybrid

Transfer case(s): Dual Toyota

Suspension (f/r): Leaf, Bilstein shocks/leaf, Bilstein shocks

Axles (f/r): Dana 60, spool/Dana 70U, welded spiders, disc brakes

Axle ratio: 7.17:1

Wheels: 15x10 Stazworks double beadlock

Tires: 18.50/44-15LT Interco Super Swamper TSL

Jake Speaks

Most looking forward to: "The Frame Twister. I'm interested in how the old blue truck will handle the logs."

Not looking forward to: "The Tow Test."

One thing you should know: "I like to smash stuff."

Jason's Blazer

With massive cubes under the hood, massive axles under the rig, and massive tires mounted to the wheels, Jason Moon's huge '91 Chevy Blazer looks to be a major player in this year's Top Truck Challenge. Soon, you'll see the rig in action and find out how he and his rig fared.

1 The first thing you probably notice about Jason's Blazer is the extended wheelbase and the hefty body mods. The huge 54s on Stazworks double beadlock wheels also stand out, as does the incredible tube work. That tube work was done by Jason's company, Moon Benders Fab. The exterior also includes a Warn Zeon 12 Platinum winch and Rigid Industries lighting. The rig's interior features include PRP custom embroidered seats and a collection of Auto Meter gauges.

2 Both of the 2½-ton Rockwell axles are locked, have Wilwood pinion brakes, and PSC hydraulic steering. The axles internals are turned via High Angle Driveline-sourced chromoly driveshafts that include 1480 U-joints. The very well protected Offroad Design NP203/205 Doubler T-case setup splits

power to the 'shafts. The suspension includes a four-link system, 18-inch-travel King coilover shocks, limit straps, and a Plan B Fab rear antiroll bar.

3 Under the hood is a ground-pounding 632ci V-8 that is reported to generate 800 hp at 5,800 rpm and 800 lb-ft of torque at 4,400 rpm. Some of its features include JE pistons, Sonny Leonard heads,

Comp Cams camshaft, a Jesel valvetrain, FAST fuel injection, and Hooker Super Comp headers. The engine draws fuel from a Jaz fuel cell and is cooled by a Be Cool radiator. Electrical demands are met in part by a custom wiring harness and a pair of Optima batteries. Power is routed through a heavily modified Coan Racing TH400 transmission that is cooled by an aftermarket cooler.



Jason Speaks

Most looking forward to: "The Tank Trap. It seems to be a challenge for many competitors, and I feel it will be one of our strong points."

Not looking forward to: "The Coal Chute. It is better suited for short wheelbase vehicles, and that's not the case with the Blazer."

One thing you should know: "I'm flat broke now, and by broke I mean \$3 in my account. But I have a badass Blazer, so watch me do a burnout!"

THE DETAILS

Driver name/city: Jason Moon/White City, Oregon

Occupation: Commercial fisherman

Vehicle model: '91 Chevy Blazer

Engine: GM 632ci V-8

Transmission: TH400

Transfer case(s): NP203/205 Offroad Design Doubler

Suspension (f/r): Four-link, King 18-in-travel coilovers, limit straps/four-link, King 18-in-travel coilovers, limit straps, Plan B Fab antiroll bar

Axles (f/r): 2½-ton Rockwell, spool, PSC hydraulic steering/2½-ton Rockwell, spool, PSC hydraulic steering

Axle ratio: 6.72:1

Wheels: 20x14 Stazworks double beadlock

Tires: 19.5/54-20 Interco Super Swamper TSL

Bogger: FW



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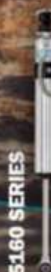
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6"	Complete Kit w/2.2 Rear Shocks	\$1399.95

2014-2015 2500 Ram PU 4WD

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5"	Complete Kit w/Radius Arms	\$999.95

2003-2013 2500/2003-2012 3500 Ram 4WD

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2.5"	Front Leveling Spacers	\$99.95
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6"	Complete Kit w/2.0 Rear Shocks	\$1299.95

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2005-2015 Tacoma 4WD

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COLLEGIATE

Carrying on the torch of the 4Runner legacy

By Ali Mansour editor@fourwheeler.com Photography: Ali Mansour

LAUNCHED IN 1984, THE TOYOTA 4RUNNER CONTINUES TO HAVE ONE OF the biggest enthusiast followings to date. Originally offered with a removable hard top, solid front and rear axles, and two doors, the 4Runner was the one of the best off-road-ready platforms of its time. Despite the rugged SUVs early success, the much-desired solid front axle was discarded in favor of IFS for the '86 model year. While the 4Runner remains a staple in the off-road world, enthusiasts have been looking to recreate the magic of the early platform for decades with the late-model offerings.

Casey McGoun's '98 Toyota 4Runner is a perfect example of combining this off-road legacy platform with modern wares. We first ran across McGoun's 4Runner at East Coast Gear Supply in Raleigh, North Carolina, where the then 20-something employee was working part-time in the shipping department. Like many of us have done, the full-time college student had been picking away at his 4Runner between school and work.

Over the years, McGoun had taken advantage of the 4Runner's ever-growing aftermarket support and created a wheeler that could easily remain reliable for his commuting needs. Once his wheeling progressed to even harder terrain, McGoun made the smart decision of removing the independent front suspension in favor of a more durable solid front axle. While there are a few conversion kits offered in the aftermarket, McGoun (along with the help of some friends) decided to build a custom kit.

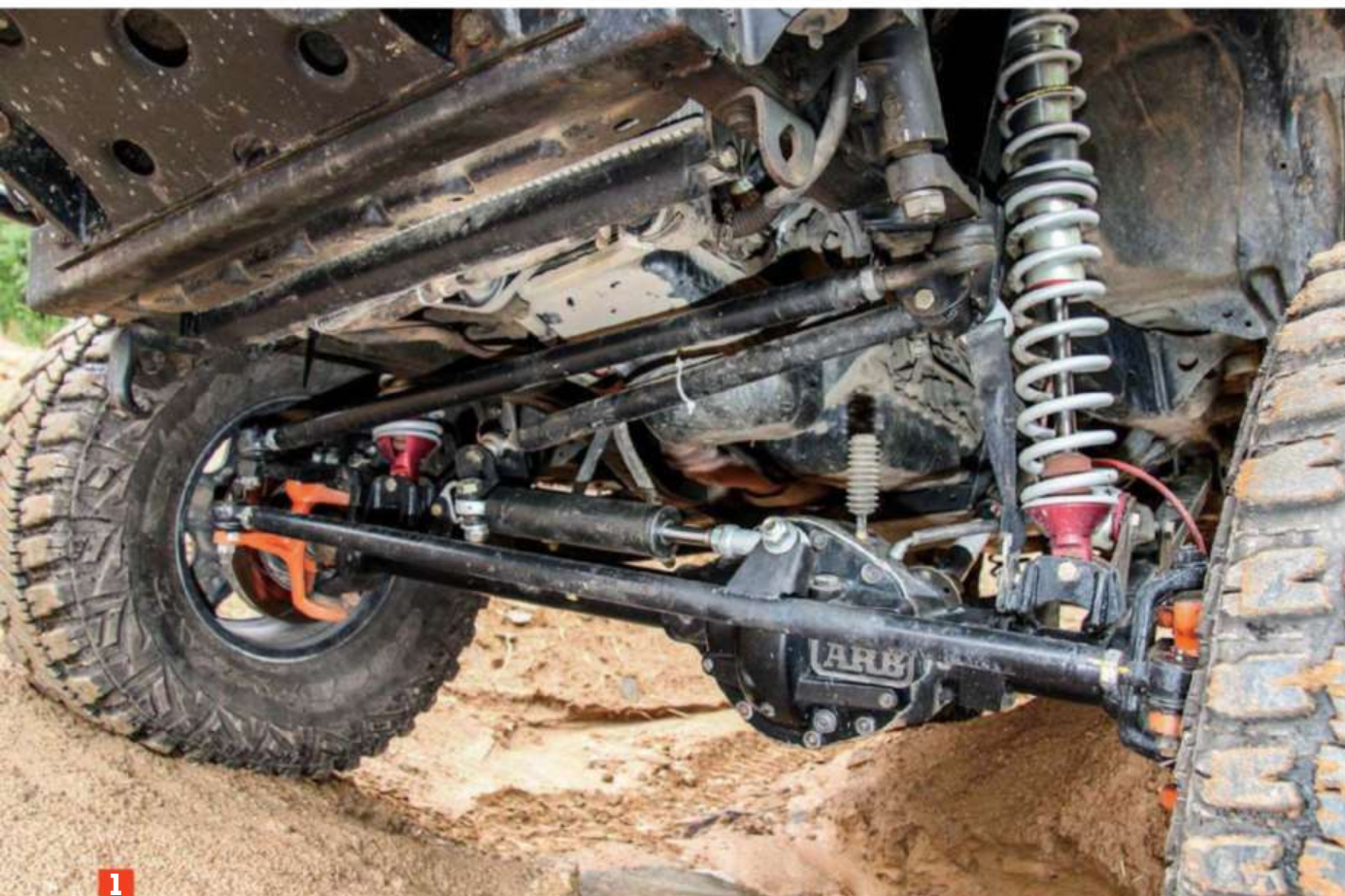
Using coilover shocks, along with a radius control-arm link suspension, McGoun was able to create a rig that could handle all of his needs. We got a chance to catch up with him and his 4Runner at the Flats Off-Road Park in Marion, North Carolina. McGoun was even nice enough to tote us around while our rig was disabled. Experiencing how well the rig performs both on- and off-road got us itching to build something similar! We're definitely fans and glad to see another example of the 4Runner torch being carried in such a solid way.



CWe've spent some time wheeling with McGoun and were impressed with how well the 4Runner worked, even on some of the more difficult trails. Compared to a sea of JKs on 37s, this Desert Dune 4Runner stands apart from the pack. Even with the high-mileage powertrain, McGoun wasn't afraid to use the skinny pedal to get the rig where he needed it to go.

CRAWLER





1 A large undertaking for any experience level, McGoun removed the often problematic independent front suspension in favor of a more robust solid axle. The 60-inch WMS Dana 44 frontend was sourced from a Jeep Wagoneer. Inside, it's packed with an ARB Air Locker, 4.88 gears, and a set of chromoly axleshafts. Providing lift is a set of 2½-inch, 12-inch-travel Sway-A-Way coilover shocks. PAC springs with a primary rate of 200 in-lb and secondary rate of 300 in-lb provide the supple ride and performance.

2 To complete the custom steering setup, McGoun used Trail-Gear frame plates and steering box mount, in addition to notching out the frame so the flat pitman arm would clear. A Crane steering arm works with the Reid Racing steering knuckles to provide plenty of clearance for the 1.5-inch, 0.250-wall DOM steering links. To make the steering movement easier off-road, a tapped steering gearbox was purchased from Trail-Gear and plumbed to a 6-inch-stroke hydraulic-assist ram.

3 To improve the approach angle and increase nose protection, an Addicted Offroad front bumper was installed. The high-clearance setup holds a Smittybilt 8,000-pound winch, and tucked just behind the grill is a Derale power steering cooler. The radius arm setup provides plenty of articulation for the rig, so much so that McGoun decided to restrain the downwards travel with a set of limit straps from Trail-Gear.





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BRAKES



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4. A fresh set of 4.88 gears, along with a Toyota E-Locker, provides the go force for the 35-inch-tall Goodyear MT/Rs. Since when we shot the feature, McGoun has added wheel spacers to help increase stability and provide the extra bit of component clearance he needed. Old Man Emu 850J coils work with OME 12-inch-travel shocks to give the SUV around 6 inches of lift. McGoun was really hoping to have the rig around 3 inches lower, which we think explains why his buddies call him Casey 3-inch, or C3 for short.

5. A TRD boost gauge, Innovative Motorsports Air/Fuel display, and UltraGauge OBD-II interface offer extra insight into the 4Runners performance. While the Toyota's transfer case was kept stock, the A340F automatic transmission did get an IPT valvebody upgrade and accumulator springs, along with a TRD cooler that's fit with its own electric fan. For you astute 4Runner enthusiasts, you may notice that a nicer steering wheel was swapped in from a '99 model.

6. McGoun might be a college-aged wheeler, but he's got plenty of wheeling experience. Since there's no trailer for this daily driver, he totes the spare parts and tools he needs to keep it going. The fancy ARB fridge/freezer is also a handy upgrade for those long weekends camping in the Carolina mountains.

7. This generation 4Runner has plenty of rear overhang from the factory. To offer more protection, a CBI Offroad rear bumper with a tire carrier was installed. This setup makes it easy to still access the cargo area, while doing a fine job of holding the spare 315/75R16 Goodyear MT/R.

8. Under the hood, the 4Runner's 3.4L V-6 engine gets a bump in power thanks to a TRD supercharger. A Split Second piggyback ECU works with a URD 7th injector kit to allow the 5VZ-FE series engine to breath correctly. Freeing up even more flow is a set of OBX headers and TRD after-cat exhaust.



AT A GLANCE

GENERAL

Vehicle: '98 Toyota 4Runner
Owner: Casey McGoun
Stomping grounds: Raleigh, North Carolina
Build Time: 2 Years

DRIVETRAIN

Engine: 3.4L, V-6, TRD Supercharger
Transmission: A340F automatic
Transfer case(s): Stock
Low range ratio(s): 2.56:1
Crawl ratio(s): 34.98:1
Front axle/differential: Dana 44, Yukon hubs, chromoly axleshafts/ARB Air Locker, 4.88 gears
Rear axle/differential: Toyota 8-in/TRD E-Locker, 4.88 gears

SUSPENSION

Front: Custom 2-in, 0.250-wall radius arms, Ballistic Fab joints; 2 1/4-in, 12-in-travel Sway-A-Way coilovers; PAC 200/300 springs
Rear: Custom control arms, Old Man Emu 850J springs, Old Man Emu 12-in-travel shocks
Steering: Trail-Gear-tapped Toyota gearbox, Reid Racing knuckles, Crane high-steer arm, 2x6-in hydro-assist ram

TIRES/WHEELS

Tires: 16x8 SCS F5 Alloy
Wheels: 315/75R16 Goodyear MT/R

MISCELLANEOUS

Armor: Addicted Offroad front bumper, CBI rear bumper/tire carrier, Stubbs Welding HD-SKO sliders, modified first-gen 4Runner interior rollbar
Cool Stuff: Satoshi grille, ARB 50qt. Fridge/Freezer, Smittybilt winch, Oliver's Custom Drive Shafts **FW**



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The '77 Rancher Special's list price was \$5,557.50. This one has only two options: a rear seat for \$160 and the top for \$322 (\$336 with the sunroof). The color is Winter White (paint code 9219). It was built on June 9, 1977, and shipped to Dow Hammond International Truck in Modesto, California. Its life from there is unclear, though likely related to farming. Jeff Ismail found the Scout on Craigslist in December 2013, bought it, started the restoration in the last week of March 2014, and finished it near the end of July 2014.

BACKWARD GLANCES 1977 Scout SSII Rancher Special

THE INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER (IH) SCOUT is 4x4 icon, but it struggled to maintain market share, especially in its last few years of production. That had less to do with the vehicle and more to do with International's business model. We'll save that discussion for the financial gurus on cable news. In the growing 4x4 market, Scout's biggest marketing problem was perpetually being on the edges of the sales mainstream in a market that was growing exponentially. Yeah, they advertised, but you generally didn't go down Main Street to kick the tires on Scouts like you did Chevys, Fords, Dodges or Jeeps. You went to the industrial district or a tractor dealer on the outskirts of town, neither being places the average mainstream buyer frequented.

The marketing folks at the division knew the mainstream game but found it hard work getting execs more familiar with selling heavy-duty truck or farm equipment to play it the right way. That finally changed in 1976, when the company signed off on a marketing campaign built around a sporty new Scout II model then sponsoring four well-known NORRA desert racers to race them. They did



The top and soft doors came from Whitco and were available in white or black. A non-opening sunroof was an option. Sometimes the tops were installed by IH before shipment and sometimes by the dealer. Versus a Jeep or small Bronco, the Scout was roomier and stouter but larger, heavier, and less agile. Versus a Blazer, Ramcharger, or the later large Bronco, it was smaller and lighter and therefore a little more agile. The dealer list price of a base SSII was about \$770 more than a base CJ-5 and \$670 more than a base CJ-7.

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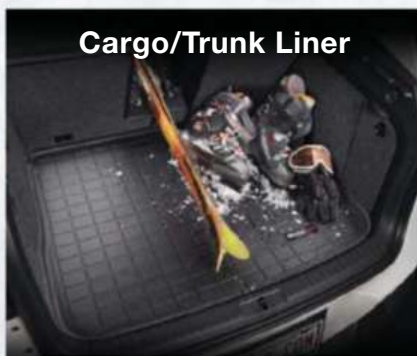
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well, too, but that's another story.

It isn't clear who laid the egg of the idea, but the cornerstone was set in the latter part of 1975 with a concept rig Scout drawn up by IH stylist Dick Hatch. Initially called the Mountaineer, Hatch penned a Scout II without roof or doors, added a roll bar, a stylish new grille, and plastic door inserts. As it evolved, so did the name, and Scout Side Kick (SSK) became the working name as the prototype was developed. Eventually, to avoid problems with Mercedes (there was once a Mercedes SSK), Larry Ehlers and Howard Pletcher at IH brainstormed the name Super Scout, which

soon became abbreviated to SS and later SSII.

The internal product news announcement came on December 22, 1976, but the SSII was introduced to dealers in January 1977 at Parker, Arizona, with two of the sponsored Class 3 Baja racers, Jimmy Jones and Frank Howarth, on hand to show what the SSII could do. The production SSIIIs were very much like the concept. A base SSII listed at \$5,168 and came with the 86hp, 196ci International four-cylinder, T-332 (Warner T-15D) three-speed manual, Dana 44s front and rear, street tires, and 4.09:1 axle ratios. The open body was standard with door inserts, rollbar, fuel tank

❖ Not even a radio! The upholstery color, what little upholstery there is, was called Tanbark. Floor mats were optional, and this one wasn't ordered with them. Note the snapped-on covers over the defroster vents. These were to prevent a dust storm when the defrosters were activated after off-roading.



❖ The SSII retained the normal Scout's 6,200-pound GVW. The higher GVW was adopted to avoid the onset of catalytic converters for the '76s, which the Scout did until the '79s. Weighing in at only 3,300 pounds, the Rancher Special certainly had a lot of reserve carrying capacity, certainly more than you could stuff in here. By the standards of the class, the Scout was much roomier than its primary Jeep competition.

❖ One thing for which Scouts were noted was a stout, fully boxed chassis. Dana 44s were standard front and rear and a Trac-Loc was optional in the rear for an additional \$82. Earlier in Scout's production, limited slips had been optional front and rear. The fuel tank skidplate was standard for the SSII but optional on the Scout II hardtops. Optional axle ratios cost \$16.50. For '77s, only 3.07, 3.54, and 4.09 were listed, depending on the engine and transmission combination.



THE DETAILS

Vehicle: '77 International Scout SSII
 Owner: Jeff Ismail
 Estimated value: \$25,000
 Engine: 196ci OHV I-4 (IH 4-196)
 Power (hp): 86 @ 3,800
 Torque (lb-ft): 157 @ 2,200
 Bore & stroke (in): 4.135 x 3.656
 Comp. ratio: 8.02:1
 Transmission: 4-spd, IH T-427 (Warner T-19A)
 Transfer case: 2-spd IH TC-145 (Dana 20)
 Front axle: IH FA-44 (Dana 44)
 Rear axle: IH RA-18 (Dana 44)
 Axle ratio: 3.54:1
 Tires: H78-15 M&S (General Gripper 780)
 Wheelbase (in): 100
 GVW (lb): 6,200
 Curb weight (lb): 3,300
 Fuel capacity (gal): 19
 Min. grd. clearance (in): 7.6
 Approach angle (deg): 44
 Departure angle (deg): 22



❖ The International 196ci slant-four was half a medium-duty 392ci V-8. In the '77 it made a respectable 86 SAE net horsepower and could deliver fuel economy in the high teens. The slant-four was developed in 1960, inspired by Pontiac's Trophy-4, which was half of a 389ci V-8. The IH fours were manufactured on the same tooling as the V-8 and used many of the same internal parts. In the original development, 133, 152, and 173ci fours were considered (based on the 266, 304, and 345ci V-8s introduced in 1959) and the 152ci variant was chosen for the first-generation '61 Scout. When the 392ci V-8 debuted in 1966, the 196ci four was developed from it at the same time. It was an option over the 152ci to the end of 1968, after which it became the standard Scout engine. The optional V-304A and V-345A V-8s came standard with dual exhaust.

❖ International favored a spring-under configuration. The bar connecting the front shackles is its version of a sway bar. It was effective and cheap and first appeared in the '74s. The Dana 44 front became standard in the Scout II for '75 but had been optional since '72. This Scout has manual steering but a Saginaw power steering setup was a \$189 option.

skidplate, two-speed transfer case (a single speed was normally standard in Scouts), power front disc brakes, and snapped-in defroster vent covers. A passenger seat, top, and rear bumper were optional. The SSII could be ordered with just about any à la carte mechanical option, but four powertrain/options packages were also offered: the Rancher Special, Brush Buster, Sport, and Baja Cruiser.

The Rancher Special and Brush Buster packages were similar cosmetically and feature-wise, with two front seats, front towhooks, painted rear bumpers, H78-15 mud and snow tires, T-427 wide-ratio four-speed transmission, and 3.54:1 axle ratios. The Rancher kept the 196ci four, while the Buster got a 304ci two-barrel V-8. The Rancher had the 4.09 cogs optional, and the Buster got 3.54s with a standard rear Trac-Loc limited-slip differential. The next year, you could order 4.09s with the 304.

The Sport was largely the same as the Buster but got a T-407 automatic (Chrysler TF727), the Offroad Tire Package (10x15 Goodyear Tracker blackwalls on white spoke wheels with rubber wheelwell extensions), an AM radio, and a black and gold side appliqué. The Baja Cruiser added the 345ci V-8, rear Trac-Loc, AM/FM radio with a center console, and white-letter tires off-road tires. The Sport and Baja Cruiser with the lurid '70s appliqués generally are what comes to most people's mind when they think of the SSII. The Scout SSII was built through the '79 model year to the tune of just under 4,000 units.

In collector circles, the high-end, decked-out rigs are often given the most attention and attract the highest prices. Here's a notable exception to that rule: a 4x4 no red-blooded four-wheeler can fail to love. It's a '77 Rancher Special that was restored to better than new by IH Guru Jeff Ismail, owner of IH Parts America in Grass Valley, California. This was a rare departure for Jeff, who is better known for Scout buildups than Scout restorations. He claims some otherworldly influence compelled him to restore the Rancher Special to a Concours level. Not only are Rancher Special packages extremely rare, this one is perfect down to original period H78-15 General Gripper 780 tires. This time capsule was the center of attention at the 2014 IH Scout and Light Truck Nationals in Troy, Ohio, and took home the Ted Ornas Award for the best original Scout. **FW**

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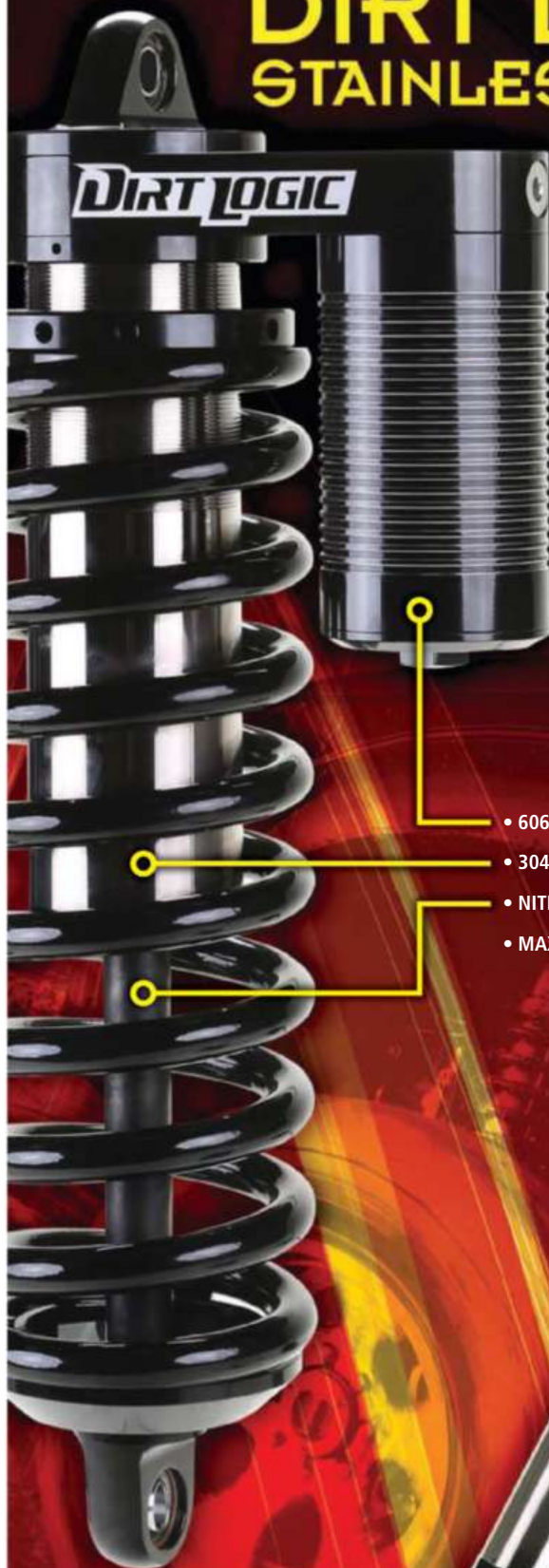
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HOW TO MAKE THEM LAST: GEAR SETUP TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

What to know before attempting your own regear

By **Agustin Jimenez** editor@fourwheeler.com Photography: Agustin Jimenez, Jerrod Jones, and Ted Olmsted

ADDING BIGGER TIRES TO A 4X4 IS A RITE OF passage that we all go through in our early days of four-wheeling. Most of us are of the mentality that you can never have too much of a good thing, like ice cream, bacon, and of course, big gnarly tires! The more rubber between your wheels and the trail, the more places your rig can conquer off the beaten path. While it sounds like a great idea, it's not without some consequences, the biggest of which will be having enough power to make your rig move out of its own way with the parasitic loss of larger tires. The quickest way to gain that lost power back is to upgrade the gears on your rig to a lower ratio (numerically higher) gearset.

Your new gears should be chosen based on the size of the tires you'll be using, as well as the type of wheeling you'll be encountering and whether or not you will trailer your 4x4 to the trailhead or daily drive it on the highway. Once you have done your homework on what the proper gear ratio for your 4x4 is, you'll need to decide whether you want to try your hand at setting up your own gears or taking it to a knowledgeable installer to make sure the job is done right.

Installing gears isn't quite as easy as most people might think. It's the little details that can mean the difference between a long, healthy gear life or a trip home from the trail on a tow truck. We've decided to show you

some of the finer points of a proper gear installation for a stronger and longer-lived gearset in a high-torque application that routinely sees gnarly off-road conditions, along with brutal daily driving duties in heavy traffic conditions.

Our '03 Ford F-350 Super Duty is a long-term project truck from our old sister publication, *Off-Road* magazine. This 1-ton, 6.0L Power Stroke diesel truck has seen more than its fair share of abuse over the years, but after our last desert outing, old Big and Purple decided to develop a slight vibration in the rearend while flat towing a Baja Bug out to the desert. We knew something was definitely wrong when we pulled the magnetic dipstick



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on our rear Mag-Hytec differential cover and were greeted by a chunk of ring gear tooth. Of course we didn't let it spoil our weekend, so we pushed on the rest of the way and drove it back home in front-wheel drive after pulling the rear axleshafts and driveshaft.

We decided that the funky combination of 5.13 gears meant for a Sterling 10.25 in our Sterling 10.5 might have been a little more than we needed for a truck with 40-inch tires and gobs of low-end torque, so we ordered up a brand-new set of Yukon Gear and Axle's 4.88 gears and master overhaul kits for both the front Dana 60 and the Sterling 10.5 rear in

our high-mileage Super Duty.

When it comes to properly installing gears on our trucks, we always go to the experts. South Bay Truck and 4x4 has done countless gear installs for us in the past that are holding up strong to this day, so we couldn't think of anyone better than them to share with us the secrets to properly setting up gears that will last for a long time in a high-powered, highly abused 4x4. Check out all the preload, pinion depth, and backlash wisdom that they shared with us to make your next set of gears stay in it for the long haul.



1. Frank Gilliland and his brother Charlie of South Bay Truck and 4x4 had our Super Duty up on the rack in no time at all, and within minutes they had pulled our rear diff cover to determine the culprit of our gear disaster.

2. With the differential cover pulled on our Sterling 10.5 rear end, we could clearly see a couple of broken teeth on the ring gear. These gears were just over three years old when they gave up the ghost, but Frank and Charlie quickly set us straight on how this happened. The last time the gears were done on this truck at a different shop, the carrier preload was not adjusted properly and ended up resulting in a catastrophic failure after the carrier bearings spun inside the housing. The loose carrier sent our backlash out of spec, and while going down the highway, the structural integrity of the gear mesh pattern was compromised. Long story short? Gear teeth go bang.



3. While the Dana 60 front axle in our Super Duty didn't fail catastrophically, it did howl quite a bit while limping the truck back home for 160 miles in front-wheel drive. Once Charlie pulled the differential cover off the front axle, it was clear that the gears were starting to exhibit a little knifing due to an improper carrier preload. Do you see a pattern?

4. The Yukon Gear and Axle Dana 60 and Sterling 10.5 4.88 gears and the Master Overhaul kits should be the long-term solution to our gear issues once properly installed. While you can install a set of 5.13 gears in a Sterling 10.5 by using a Sterling 10.25 ring-and-pinion with a taller pinion bearing, we decided on using 4.88 gears instead since we do a lot of highway driving with this truck to get to the trailhead and, with all the low-end torque of the 6.0L Power Stroke, we really weren't hurting for power.

5. The new Yukon Gear and Axle ring gear was dropped onto our ARB Air Locker, and once we had the ring gear properly positioned on the carrier, we gave each of the new ring gear bolts a few drops of Loctite before torquing them down to the specified 95 ft-lb of torque. Make sure you use a brake parts cleaner to remove any protective coating or oily residue that the ring-and-pinion might have on its surface.

6. Frank and Charlie tell us that it's a good idea to make a note of the shim stack taken out with the old gearset. Make sure you save your old pinion nut so you don't have to use the new pinion nut, which really should only be used during final assembly. It's important to note that the crush sleeve should also be omitted until final assembly so you don't run the risk of accidentally ruining it.



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7. Here you can see the relationship between the ring-and-pinion gear and how the pinion depth can be changed by either adding more shims to the pinion to set the depth deeper or removing shims to set it shallower. Keep in mind that on a Ford 9-inch axle, adding shims to the pinion support will result in a shallow pinion depth, while removing shims will move it in deeper. The first thing to do is set up

your pinion depth so you can set the pinion preload. Typically the factory will call for a pinion depth of 0.025-inch, so it's a good rule of thumb to use that as your starting point. Next you can install the pinion in the housing and tighten the old pinion nut. Frank recommends installing the pinion without the crush sleeve and tightening the old pinion nut until you feel a bit of drag on the pinion. You should be able to turn it by hand but not enough to where the pinion is wobbling in the housing. The key thing to remember is that a snug fit is good. What this will do is allow you to get 20-35 in-lb of preload on the pinion. Make sure you use an inch-pound torque wrench when checking the pinion preload.

8. Once the proper preload has been achieved, the carrier is ready to be installed in the housing. Since our Super Duty was already equipped with ARB Air Lockers, we installed new seals in the seal housing and installed it onto our ARB Air Locker.

9. This is a crucial step in the setup process, and if you're not careful, you could be in for a catastrophic failure down the road. You want to make sure you have some amount of backlash so that the gears aren't forcing against one another but have it close enough that you can achieve the proper setting. The carrier should not drop in with a loose fit. It should take a little bit of effort with a brass drift and a hammer to achieve a snug fit. This doesn't mean you should hammer down on it like there's no tomorrow. A snug fit is what you're after. Once you get the carrier in, you can install the carrier caps and torque them down to 80 ft-lb of torque.

10. The next step is to install a dial indicator tool so you can accurately check the amount of backlash between the ring-and-pinion. Rotate the ring gear until you meet a bit of resistance and then go ahead and zero out your dial indicator so you can check the amount of backlash.

11. You want to aim for a backlash of 0.006-0.010 inches and then apply the marking compound to the ring gear in a few spots so you can check the mesh pattern. You want the pattern to be smooth and even on both the drive and coast side, preferably in the center of the tooth. The outside edge of the ring gear is known as the heel, while the inside edge is known as the toe. A pattern that is biased toward the heel means your ring gear needs to be moved closer to the pinion, while a toe-biased pattern means the ring gear needs to be moved away from the pinion. A high-contact pattern means your pinion depth needs to be increased while a low to light contact pattern means you need to move the pinion away from the ring gear by decreasing the shim thickness.

12. Once you have achieved the proper 0.006-0.010-inch of backlash, as well as an acceptable gear mesh pattern, you are ready to pull everything back apart and install your crush sleeve and new pinion nut. In our case, our backlash came in at 0.008-inch, which is ideal for a strong healthy gear mesh. It's a good idea to add a few drops of Loctite onto the threads of the pinion, as well as the new pinion nut. Make sure you use a reliable ½-inch pneumatic impact gun and stop to check the pinion preload often or you'll end up going too far and ruin the crush sleeve. The pinion preload should be set at 0.020-0.035 in-lb of torque on new bearings such as the ones we used. Frank recommends aiming for 0.020-0.025 for a long lasting gear life.





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13. Once we had the hard part of our Super Duty's Sterling 10.5 axle wrapped up, Frank added a bead of silicone to the gasket-mating surface for a leak-free seal.

14. Frank then installed our Mag-Hytec finned aluminum differential cover. We've come to really love this differential cover since it offers a larger capacity for oil to help dissipate any heat buildup from hardcore use, whether wheeling or towing.

15. We topped off both the front and rear differentials with synthetic gear oil that helps keep the bearings working at cooler temperatures, even in demanding environments.



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16. One of the added benefits of the Mag-Hytec finned aluminum differential cover is that it gives us both a drain plug and a magnetic filler dipstick that allows us to quickly check the oil without spilling a drop.

17. We've now logged just over 3,000 miles on our new gears and we're glad to say they're working smooth and quietly. We even drove our project Super Duty all the way out to Moab earlier this year for the 2015 Easter Jeep Safari, where we got a chance to wheel the truck on the Fullsize Invasion run. We still have plenty of torque at low rpms, but highway cruising is a lot more civil now thanks to the fact we're not revving our 6.0L Power Stroke to the moon while doing 80 mph down the highway. **FW**

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818/786-8325, mag-hytec.com

South Bay Truck and 4x4
310/210-0715, southbaytruckand4x4.com

Yukon Gear and Axle
888/905-5044, yukongear.com

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BFGOODRICH ALL-TERRAIN KO2 REVIEW

A worthy successor to BFG's long line of exceptional All-Terrains

By Sean P. Holman editor@fourwheeler.com Photography: Sean P. Holman



BFGOODRICH HAS BIG HOPES FOR ITS ALL-new All-Terrain KO2, the successor to the highly popular BFG A-T KO. Launched about 15 years ago, the KO set the standard for the All-Terrain category in the off-road industry, replacing the venerable All-Terrain, which could be found on everything from Baja chase trucks to lifted daily drivers.

How competitive the BFG KO proved to be, right up to the introduction of the KO2, is a testament to BFG's engineering prowess, as many still considered the aging KO to still be the standard of which all all-terrain tires should be judged. However, the reality was that the competition marched on and got much, much better during the KO's reign. And truth be told, the KO was starting to show cracks in its armor. While still a very good tire, the design was dated and the KO had caught a reputation for being susceptible to pinch flats and sidewall punctures, and the tread compound, while long-wearing, easily chunked in abrasive terrain.

Complicating matters was an all-terrain market that exploded with new and updated competitors, as well as a new category of tire, the extreme all-terrain, which combined the looks of a more aggressive M/T with the manners of an A/T. With a competitive new landscape to contend in, BFG's reputation hinged on the successfully redesigned KO2 tire.

BFG engineers went to work, and what they emerged with is the KO2 you see here. Inspired by the toughness of the Baja T/A KR line, the KO2 features CoreGuard technology that improves split and bruise resistance in the sidewall, as well as adds thicker shoulder rubber that extends further into the sidewall. BFG says the KO2 sidewall is 20 percent stronger than the KO. Tread was also an area of focus. Now featuring a new compound that reduces

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chunking and lasts 15 percent longer on asphalt and 50 percent more on gravel.

Not satisfied with just changing the nuts and bolts of the carcass, BFG also modified the signature tread pattern. While still familiar to any BFG fan, the updated footprint looks fresh and, when combined with the toothy Side Biter sidewall lugs, gives it a more contemporary appearance that will allow the KO2 to better compete against traditional all-terrain tires, as well as the more aggressive extreme all-terrains. The design has been optimized for more even wear and now adds features such as Mud-Phobic bars, serrated shoulders, stone ejectors, and increased siping. BFG says the new pattern is good for a 10 percent increase in traction in mud and 19 percent in snow and that the entire KO2 line-up now achieves the coveted Mountain Snowflake symbol.

After having driven on the KO2 over a brief stay in Baja and having been ultimately impressed, BFG asked if we would be interested in doing a longer-term test back on our home turf. Having the perfect test vehicle, a '12 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited with a set of 37x12.5R17

BF Goodrich KOs already mounted on it, we thought it would be a great opportunity to test the KOs versus the new KO2s back to back. So, with tires in hand, we headed to our local America's Tire (Discount Tire outside of Cali-



☞ For our test we chose the KO2s in a 37x12.5R17 mounted on a 17x8.5-inch AEV Savegre wheel.

☞ While the tread of the KO2 doesn't look all that much different than the KO it replaces, when placed next to a KO, you can see the changes are fairly significant.

fornia) in Huntington Beach, California, for mounting and balancing.

Over the course of the following 2 months, we drove the Jeep in everything from commuting to trail riding. We had a chance to sample the KO2s in the rain, as well as on sharp-edged terrain, and regular desert two-tracks. The only environments we didn't get to test the tires were in snow and in mud. Our first impression of the KO2s was how fresh the new pattern looks out in the wild and especially on our test rig. Mounted on AEV 17x8.5-inch Savegre wheels, the KO2s sport a perfect sidewall bulge and a nice stance. The new tread looks modern and aggressive, but what really impressed us was how round the new tires were. With one tire needing only a ½-ounce of weight to balance, the roundness of the tire and the quietness of the tread was a noticeable improvement over our 20,000-mile-old KOs.

On the highway, the All-Terrains have the great manners you would expect from BFG, with fantastic directional stability, good steering feedback, and surprisingly good grip. The new shoes allowed us to toss the Jeep into



☞ On close examination, you can see several of the new sidewall features, including the thicker extended shoulder, Side Biter lugs, Mud-Phobic bars, and serrated shoulder.



☞ Looking closer at the tread revealed another view of the serrated shoulder and Mud-Phobic bars, along with additional siping and the very welcome triangular stone ejectors.



corners and take off-ramps at higher speeds without ever feeling like they were near the limits. In fact, we often unintentionally activated the stability system before the tires even started to lose grip. In panic breaking, wet or dry, the KO2s again exhibited no bad habits and hauled the Wrangler down in short order. At freeway speeds in a relative deluge, we had no issues with hydroplaning and the KO2s remained sure-footed. As quiet and smooth as any all-terrain on the market, and even some "highway" tires, the excellent road manners of the KO2 allow the Jeep to be an enjoyable tool for longer drives out to the dirt.

On the trail, the KO2s handled everything that we threw at them, even at highway pressures. Hard-packed two-tracks are fun, and the KO2s will still allow you to drift through corners with a little extra throttle. When we aired down to about 12 psi, things got even better. The floatation is incredible, and the Jeep cut through sand dunes as if they were paved. Rocky outcroppings became a place we headed, rather than avoided, and the Jeep climbed effortlessly up a loose and craggy hillclimb that has given us fits before with lesser shoes. At the end of multiple trips, the tires showed almost no signs of wear, even still exhibiting the little nubs that are the hallmark of a new tire. Not one tire showed any signs of cutting or chunking. These tires are everything you love about the KO, except better—at least in all the situations we tested them.

So after more than 1,000 miles of commuting, highway, road trip, desert, sand, rain, dirt, and rocks, we can tell you that BFG hit its mark with the KO2. The tire is hands-down one of the best all-terrain tires on the market and should be on the very short list of all-terrains to consider. While sizing and availability may be constrained during the rollout period, BFG tells us it has an incredible 61 sizes planned for the KO2, and we think they are worth the wait. BFGoodrich is once again redefining what an all-terrain can and should be with the All-terrain KO2: a worthy successor to BFG's long line of bar-setting all-terrain tires. **FW**

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AEV
248/926-0256, aev-conversions.com

America's Tire/Discount Tire
866-895-8031, discounttire.com

BFGoodrich
877-788-8899, www.bfgoodrichtires.com

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Softride® Coil Kits can still be outfitted on older models to offer the benefits and advantage the superior ride when lifted.

Rock Ready® Coil Kits higher/ Earlier OE match spring rate is a great choice for any year model with additional weight of bumpers, body armor, skid plates and winches assisting in maintaining lifted height and superior off-road ride.

Skyjacker® offers Softride® kits with every available shock option, Hydro, Nitro Gas and M95 Series Monotube with its dirt bike type technology for leak down protection you cannot find anywhere else.

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2015 Jeep Cherokee Trailhawk 4x4

The Hawk has landed

WE KNEW WE WERE IN for a serious beating from our loyal followers as soon as we tallied the votes. How could we let the car-based and polarizingly shaped Cherokee beat the old-school Toyota 4Runner TRD Pro for Four Wheeler of the Year honors? Impossible! Blasphemy! Unfollow! Cancel my subscription! All of us who participated in the weeklong testing process knew why it was so well deserved. The Toyota drives and feels like a 10-year-old truck. The Cherokee feels like tomorrow's SUV. It's stylish, smooth, quiet, sporty, and efficient. The interior is modern, comfortable, and smacks of quality materials and assembly. Most important of all, it's extremely capable and fun to drive in the dirt, and if

you're one of the many doubters of its off-road chops, you should really experience one on the trail before you pass judgment.

Jeep should be awarded just for making the investment in this highly unique drivetrain. Low range is achieved without a transfer case by putting the gear reduction in the axles, and the combination of a very good crawl ratio and a selectable rear locker in a compact crossover works way better than you'd expect. Yes, there's very little suspension articulation, but that doesn't impede progress. The result is the occasional tire being lifted in the air with no delay in forward movement. Further testing since our long-term Cherokee arrived has revealed that this chassis is also quite a performer on twisty blacktop, feeling much

➔ **"IF YOU'RE ONE OF THE MANY DOUBTERS OF ITS OFF-ROAD CHOPS, YOU SHOULD REALLY EXPERIENCE ONE ON THE TRAIL BEFORE YOU PASS JUDGMENT."**

sportier that we remember from Four Wheeler of the Year testing, which is mostly focused on dirt roads. The only drawback on the street is the Firestone A/T tires, which lose grip in the corners way before the chassis wants to give up. The ability to cruise at highway speeds quietly

and comfortably, carve up paved mountain roads at high speeds, and then be able to hit the trail is very unique and gives the Cherokee a dual sporting personality. One more interesting point is that this is the first time a transverse-engine vehicle has won our award.

Most of the criticism we've seen about the Cherokee so far has stemmed from its ZF-sourced nine-speed transmission, but it appears the one we've received for long-term evaluation has the latest software and so far has acted very well. Ninth gear is so tall (0.48:1) that it's rarely selected, even in steady speed cruising on freeways, and seems to be reserved for downhill or downwind stretches only.

So far one of our only serious complaints is about lack of range caused by the low fuel capacity (15.9 gallons), with the typical distance between fill ups being just shy of 300 miles. That's acceptable, but we like rigs that can outlast one's bladder on long distance road trips. All other misgivings are regarding some of the electronic systems, and we've just learned that Chero-

kees in particular are susceptible to hacking via its Uconnect system, with a viral video showing hackers able to change climate control, radio settings, and even shutting down the car. A free software refresh is available to prevent that from happening.

Other technologies that so far appear to be well intentioned, but not quite ready, are the adaptive cruise control and lane-departure assist. The cruise control works well at relatively steady speeds, where traffic is ranging between 50 and 75 mph, but stop-and-go traffic throws it into fits, constantly triggering the crash mitigation system while chiming and flashing a message on the info screen to brake immediately or leaving much too large a gap in front of the car when speeds recover. The problem is that it can't anticipate slowing and accelerating traffic

several cars ahead, so it tends to overcorrect in both directions. The lane departure assist system occasionally mistakes grooves and other lines in the road for lane markers and tries to follow them. We're still not accustomed to the car trying to steer itself, but we'll leave this feature on until it either becomes a welcome addition or relegated to being just another annoying nanny. The crash mitigation system is fantastic, and it's hard to imagine what it would take to actually crash into something while it's activated. Not only does it give you a visual and audible warning, but it applies the brakes as well, completely stopping if necessary. The price to be paid is the system occasionally mistaking a car turning into a parking lot that's actually clear of your path as a hazard, automatically slamming on the brakes and

pleading that you to apply the brakes as well.

The baby 3.2L Pentastar V-6 is very smooth and makes strong midrange power, but it runs out of breath on the top end. Overall the experience is of adequate, but not fast, acceleration (8-second 0-60) and better-than-expected efficiency. We're curious just how much efficiency is gained by removing only 400 cc of displacement from the larger and ubiquitous version.

So far we've explored our local Wildomar OHV Park, the backcountry around Big Bear Lake, and a road trip to California's Central Coast. Next on the agenda is to head back to the hill near Convict Lake, California, that sent our previous tester back to the shop. As usual, we'll be keeping track of the overall experience for a year and will report everything, good and bad. **FW**

REPORT: 1 OF 4

Previous reports: None

Base price: \$30,395

Price as tested: \$39,895

Four-wheel-drive

system: Full-time, electronically controlled, two-speed

LONG-TERM NUMBERS

Miles to date: 3,791

Miles since

last report: N/A

Average mpg

(this report): 19.5

Test best tank (mpg): 23.5
(Highway between 70-75 mph)

Test worst tank (mpg): 17.1
(Mostly city)

MAINTENANCE

This period: None

Problem areas: Hackers
(if you believe the internet)

WHAT'S HOT, WHAT'S NOT

HOT: Fun, stylish, sporty

NOT: Range, tires, finicky electronics

LOGBOOK QUOTES

☞ "The chassis writes a check that the tires can't cash"

☞ "Speed bumps confuse traction-control software"

☞ "Way more fun on paved twisty mountain roads than you'd expect"



Options As Tested

SafetyTec Group – Blind Spot and Cross Path Detection, Power Multi-Function Mirrors with Manual Fold-Away (\$1,045), Technology Group – Full Speed Collision Warning with Crash Mitigation, Parallel and Perpendicular Park Assist, Adaptive Cruise Control with Stop and Go, Advanced Brake Assist, Rain Sensitive Windshield Wipers, Exterior Mirrors with Turn Signals, Automatic High Beam Headlamp Control, LaneSense Lane Departure Warning (\$1,495), Comfort / Convenience Group – Power Liftgate, Remote Start System, Keyless Enter-N-Go / Passive Entry, A/C Auto Temperature Control with Dual Zone Control, Auto-Dimming Rearview Mirror w/Microphone, Power Eight-Way Driver Seat, Power Four-Way Driver Lumbar Adjust, Security Alarm, Universal Garage Door Opener (\$1,645), Leather Interior Group – Leather Trimmed Bucket Seats, Heated Front Seats, Heated Steering Wheel (\$1,495), 3.2-Liter V6 24-Valve VVT Engine with Stop/Start – Stop / Start System, Dual Bright Exhaust Outlets (\$1,745), Black Hood Decal (\$199), Uconnect 8.4AN AM/FM/SXM/HD/BT/NAV – GPS Navigation, HD Radio, SiriusXM Travel Link / 5-Year Subscription, SiriusXM Traffic / 5-Year Service (\$845)

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SUPER COUPON

27 LED PORTABLE WORKLIGHT/FLASHLIGHT
LOT 67227 shown
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Batteries included.

29601100

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500 LB. CAPACITY ALUMINUM CARGO CARRIER



SAVE \$70

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69688/60771

\$7999 REG. PRICE \$149.99

29592001

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SUPER COUPON

8 CHANNEL SURVEILLANCE DVR WITH 4 INFRARED CAMERAS
Genetec Mini Security
LOT 61229 shown
62463/68332/61624



SAVE \$140

\$25999 REG. PRICE \$399.99

29643209

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SUPER COUPON

13 PIECE 1/2" DRIVE DEEP WALL IMPACT SOCKET SETS
SAE LOT 67903
69280/69333 67904/69279
69560 shown 69332/69561



YOUR CHOICE!

\$1999 REG. PRICE \$49.99

SAVE 60%

PITTSBURGH

29617331

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SUPER COUPON

6 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL JACK STANDS
LOT 69596
61197/62393
38847 shown



SAVE 50%

\$3999 REG. PRICE \$79.99

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42304 shown

METRIC LOT 42305
69044



\$599 REG. PRICE \$15.99

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SUPER COUPON

drillmaster 1500 WATT DUAL TEMPERATURE HEAT GUN (572°/1112°)
LOT 96289 shown
62340/62546



SAVE 70%

\$899 REG. PRICE \$29.99

29608000

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SUPER COUPON

12" SLIDING COMPOUND DOUBLE-BEVEL MITER SAW WITH LASER GUIDE
CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS
LOT 61776
61969/61970
69684 shown



SAVE \$165

\$13499 REG. PRICE \$299.99

29594149

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SUPER COUPON

20% OFF

ANY SINGLE ITEM

29578908

WOW SUPER COUPON

2.5 HP, 21 GALLON 125 PSI VERTICAL AIR COMPRESSOR
CENTRAL PNEUMATIC
LOT 67847 shown
61454/61693/62803



SAVE \$70

\$14999 REG. PRICE \$219.99

29575732

SUPER COUPON

MIG-FLUX WELDING CART
LOT 60790/90305
61316/69340 shown



SAVE 41%

\$3499 REG. PRICE \$59.99

29578601

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SUPER COUPON

STEP STOOL/WORKING PLATFORM
HaulMaster
LOT 62515
66911 shown



SAVE 42%

\$1999 REG. PRICE \$34.99

29584686

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WITH ANY PURCHASE

PITTSBURGH 6 PIECE SCREWDRIVER SET
LOT 61313/62570
62583/62728/47770 shown



\$499 VALUE

29586398

SUPER COUPON

PITTSBURGH RAPID PUMP® 3 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK
LOT 69227/62116/62584
62590/68048 shown



SAVE \$80

\$7999 REG. PRICE \$159.99

29593487

SUPER COUPON

POWDER-FREE NITRILE GLOVES PACK OF 100
HARDY
LOT 68496/61363
68497/61360
68498 shown



SAVE 45%

\$649 REG. PRICE \$11.99

29629142

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SUPER COUPON

7 FT. 4" x 9 FT. 6" ALL PURPOSE WEATHER RESISTANT TARP
LOT 69115/69137/69249
69129/69121/877 shown



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**SUPER COUPON**Customer Rating
★★★★★**12,000 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH
WITH REMOTE CONTROL
AND AUTOMATIC BRAKE
OFF-ROAD****SAVE
\$300**LOT 61256
60813/61889
66142 shown**\$299⁹⁹**

REG. PRICE \$599.99

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SUPER COUPONCustomer Rating
★★★★★**2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH
WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL****ATV**Customer Rating
★★★★★LOT 61258 shown
61840/61297/68146**\$49⁹⁹**

REG. PRICE \$149.99

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

44", 13 DRAWER INDUSTRIAL QUALITY ROLLER CABINET

SAVE \$330 **AWARD WINNING QUALITY**

\$369⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$699.99

• Weighs 245 lbs.

LOT 69387/62270/62591/62744/68784 shown

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

900 PEAK/700 RUNNING WATTS 2 HP (63 CC) 2 CYCLE GAS RECREATIONAL GENERATOR

SAVE \$80

LOT 66619
60338
62472
69381 shown

\$99⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$179.99

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

4 PIECE 1" x 15 FT. RATCHETING TIE DOWNS

LOT 60405/61524/62322/90984 shown

\$7⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$19.99

SAVE 60%

WIRELESS WINCH REMOTE CONTROL

SAVE 62%

LOT 61474
69229 shown

\$29⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$79.99

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

PITTSBURGH 42" OFF-ROAD/FARM JACK

LOT 60668/6530 shown

• 3-1/2 Ton Capacity

SAVE 38%

\$39⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$64.99

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

20 TON SHOP PRESS

LOT 32879/60603 shown

• Pair of Arbor Plates included

\$154⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$299.99

SAVE \$145

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

1/2" INDUSTRIAL QUALITY SUPER HIGH TORQUE IMPACT WRENCH

LOT 62627
68424 shown

• 700 ft. lbs. Max. Torque

SAVE \$55

\$74⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$129.99

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WOW SUPER COUPON Customer Rating ★★★★★

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LOT 3029

SAVE 37%

\$24⁹⁹ REG. PRICE \$39.99

For off-road use only.

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2015 Power Wagon Laramie Crew Cab 4x4

Beginning our long (off) road with our 2015 Pickup Truck of the Year

IT EASILY WON OUR 2015 FOUR Wheeler Pickup Truck of the Year competition. In fact, it won by such a wide margin that we began our year-long test of the 2015 Ram Power Wagon with very high expectations. So far we've found the Power Wagon to be an exercise in excesses. There are no half-measures. Our test model arrived outfitted in exactly the same configuration as the vehicle we had in our testing, which is to say, excessively luxurious. The Lariat package gets you all the bells and whistles from front power seats with integrated heat and A/C to the high-end sound system, leather, bright grille, and dual-zone HVAC. Take all that luxury and apply the Power Wagon package and you're talking excessively

potent off-road performance, with a disconnecting front sway bar, front and rear electric lockers, additional ground clearance, Goodyear DuraTrac tires, a Warn 12,000-pound winch, and more. And the icing on the cake is Ram's quad-coil suspension that's as (you guessed it) excessively smooth, whether on- or off-road, despite the $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton 2500 chassis and 15,500-pound towing capacity. But it's also excessively large, excessively thirsty, and excessively excessive. So let's dive in.

For starters, the 6.4L Hemi puts 410 hp and 429 lb-ft to the six-speed automatic. In the heavy Power Wagon, it feels just about adequate. It's no rocketship, but it's not a slug either. No matter what the grade or load, just put your foot down and the Power

Wagon goes. It all comes at a heavy cost, though. Our biggest gripe with this truck is the abysmal fuel economy. With the aero of a brick, it's hard to get the mighty 6.4L to go into cylinder deactivation mode, especially with the 70-75 mph speeds common of our SoCal roadways. The best we've been able to muster is 14.63 mpg on an easy, loping trip down the highway returning from Hollister Hills, California. Conversely, our worst tank was that same trip, going to and from hotel back to Hollister Hills SVRA, as well as piloting the Ram up, down, and all around the off-road park's trail system during Top Truck Challenge 2015. That tank was a scary 7.92 mpg. We shudder to think what will happen when we put a heavy

trailer behind it. But despite that, we always have room inside for all our gear, plenty of power ports (12V DC, USB, or 115V AC) and a staggering 10 cupholders for the front-seat passengers alone. Road trip? Bring it. You'd just better bring your fuel card.

Inside, the cockpit is logically laid out. The navigation system is quite good and the touchscreen interface works nicely with no glitches or problems, although turning the nav off once a route is underway could be a little more intuitive. The Bluetooth, voice controls, music, and phone are all some of the best we've used in any vehicle. The Chrysler Uconnect system is pretty dialed, and we've always been fans of the steering-wheel-mounted controls for the cruise, phone, and stereo. And Ram finally did away with the old four-wheel-drive selector button that was right next to (and looked just like) the HVAC knobs. Although in the Power Wagon it's a moot point because it features a gool ol' manually operated lever you can yank and feel the T-case going into whatever gear you tell it to. And when you are off-roading, the sway bar disconnect switch and locker selection dial





☞ We lost no time in putting our '15 Ram Power Wagon to work. It's not the most impressive trailer in the world, but so far our Ram has made as many trips to the dump and builder's supply place as it has the grocery store. You gotta love having a pickup as a daily driver.

is right there at easy reach when you want it. We'll get some more off-roading and towing in by our next report.

With the fold-flat seats, a 6-foot, 4-inch bed, and Ram's excellent RamBox Cargo Management system (which we're huge fans of) we've never had to leave an item behind. Generous door pockets hold maps, magazines, and stickers to hand out; the center console easily swallows a laptop and iPad; rear floor-mounted cubbies hold greasy gloves or spare hitches; and the RamBox storage doors take anything from cargo to tow straps to groceries. Heck, we've even filled



☞ The controls are oriented nicely and ergonomically. The only thing we'd probably move is the Tow/Haul button. We've always felt it's a better fit on the end of the auto shift lever. We'll talk more about the integrated trailer brake control, park-assist feature, and backup camera in another installment.



☞ Unless your hauling requires every available inch of bed space, the RamBox Cargo Management system is worth its weight in gold. We find the boxes in the sides of the bed invaluable for hauling everything from groceries to cameras, laptops, baseball gear, and everything in between. And as a bonus, the boxes and tailgate lock and open with the passenger doors via the key fob, so you know your gear is secure when you leave it.

Options As Tested

Power Wagon Laramie Package 22J includes 17-inch steel spare wheel, 17x8 aluminum wheels, 180-amp alternator, LT285/70R17D Goodyear DuraTrac tires, 4.10 axle ratio, front disconnecting stabilizer bar, front electric winch, fuel tank skidplate shield, hill-descent control, manual shift-on-the-fly T-case, monotone paint, towhooks, T-case skid plate, Tru-Lok front and rear axles (\$7,450); 220-amp Alternator (\$100); Power Sunroof (\$995); Uconnect 8.4AN AM/FM/SXM/HB/BT/NAV (\$500); Remote Start System (\$200); RamBox Cargo Management System (\$1,295); Spray-In Bedliner (\$475)

them with ice and used them as coolers. Why else would Ram put drainplugs in the bottom of them? Just load it up as you see fit, dial in the power leather seats for maximum comfort (an easy proposition, by the way), and let the miles melt away under the somewhat annoyingly loud Goodyear tires. Good thing they claw and grip fiercely off-road.

We plan on plenty of heavy towing, lots of hauling, and some heavy wheeling in the coming months, but for now we've been mostly limited to SoCal freeway

REPORT: 1 OF 4

Previous reports: N/A
Base price: \$48,790
Price as tested: \$61,000
Four-wheel-drive system: Part-time, manual-shift, two-speed

LONG-TERM NUMBERS

Miles to date: 5,273
Miles since last report: N/A
Average mpg (this report): 11.50
Test best tank (mpg): 14.63 (highway between 70-75 mph)
Test worst tank (mpg): 7.92 (in-town and wheeling Hollister Hills SVRA during Top Truck Challenge)

MAINTENANCE

This period: None
Problem areas: None

WHAT'S HOT, WHAT'S NOT

HOT: Comfortable driver with great interior quality
NOT: Spongy brakes and wallowy handling

LOGBOOK QUOTES

☞ "Butt air in the seats! How great!"
 ☞ "Wish it had radar-guided cruise control (adaptive cruise)."
 ☞ "Climbs great even with the lockers disengaged."

commuting and around-town driving. The Ram Power Wagon is a big truck, and you sit up high above the masses. You can see a mile, which is a good thing since the brakes feel fairly spongy in a panic stop. We don't know if it's the heavy chassis or what, but our truck requires a pretty good run out when we're trying to haul it down from 70-0 mph. We've also found, despite the huge torque of the 6.4L, the transmission will downshift periodically to maintain 70-75 mph on the freeway with a slight grade. We'd think with 4.10s, only 33-inch tires, and 429 lb-ft on tap it'd pull Overdrive without an issue. In all, we're pretty excited to be in this vehicle for a full year. **FW**



NOT A 900 LB-FT FAN

Q Regarding "Ram Truck Unveils 900 lb-ft of Torque for 2016 Cummins 6.7L Engine" on fourwheeler.com, that Ram isn't gonna go anywhere with the junk transmission they all come with. The second and third generation trucks have terrible transmissions. My buddy has a '14 Cummins and his transmission took a dump with 30,000 miles on it.

DILLON PETERSON
VIA [FACEBOOK.COM/FOURWHEELERMAG](https://www.facebook.com/fourwheelermag)

A I think you might be a little misinformed. The '16 Ram 3500 slated to get the 900 lb-ft HO Cummins engine tune comes with an Aisin AS69RC medium-duty truck transmission. The Aisin AS69RC has been the only transmission available in the 3500 behind the optional HO version of the Cummins since 2013. Ram 4500 and 5500 chassis-cab trucks have received the AS69RC for several years as well. Other Cummins Ram 2500 and 3500 trucks receive the smaller 68RFE transmission or the G56 six-speed manual transmission. Both of which are rated for less torque than the AS69RC. I hear these kinds of stories and brand-loyal arguments referring to some older model that is no longer offered all the time. It's kind of a flawed argument. Should we assume that every Ford diesel is problematic because the 6.0L was? Or every GM diesel is gutless because the old non-turbo 6.2L was?

Back to your friend's truck: Was it a stock truck or modified? Was he regularly towing more than the rated capacity? Did he actually have a 3500 with the optional Aisin transmission? Not all 3500s come with it, and it's not available in the 2500. Regardless of what

transmission he had, with only 30,000 on the truck, it should have been covered under warranty, unless he did something to cause the problem.

Modifying the engine and transmission in new diesel trucks has become increasingly popular. There are plenty of aftermarket parts available to help you get more power and torque to the ground. However, it's also important to understand that Ford, GM, and Ram never intend their trucks to be modified or overloaded. You can't really blame the truck manufacturer for failures related to these situations.

GEAR STRENGTH

Q So what would it take to get six sets of axle gears from the same manufacturer and prove one way or the other if cryogenic treating and micro polishing helps strength? You'd need to figure out how to test them, but we, the consumer, need real life proof.

JEFF NOGGLE
VIA [FACEBOOK.COM/JOHNCAPPA4X4](https://www.facebook.com/johncappa4x4)



A Testing gears for torque rating in a machine would be a really cool idea. However, it would be difficult and expensive to create the jigs needed to control gear deflection as pressure is applied. There are also other variables to consider.

Cryogenic treating was a pretty hot topic for axleshafts about 10 years ago. Cryogenic treating, also called cryogenic tempering, involves slowly freezing metal-based components to minus 300 degrees. The parts are introduced to a dry deep-freezing process using flashed liquid nitrogen (LN2). It takes an average of 72 hours to modify the molecular structures of the objects before they are brought back to room temperature. Cryogenic treating stabilizes the crystal lattice structure of the metal molecules. It's regularly used on firearms, tooling, pumps, fleet brake rotors, knives, racing engines, and transmissions. The benefits range anywhere from a 50 to 600 percent longer component life. Guns shoot with as much as a 50 percent greater accuracy and 200 percent longer life. Cryogenically treated brake rotors are said to last 350 percent longer. In the case of gears and axles, cryogenic treatments are generally used to increase wear resistance. This is especially helpful when trying to increase the life of unusually expensive or hard to find drivetrain parts. A cryogenically treated part also dissipates heat more readily than a non-treated part. There is a small strength gain when parts are treated. However, there are usually other, much bigger concerns when working with a ring-and-pinion.

In order to see the greatest benefits from cryogenically treating a ring-and-pinion—or any part for that matter—it's important to start with quality components. Cryogenic treating can't make up for the use of low-grade metals or an improperly performed heat-treating process. Unfortunately, low-quality imported ring-and-pinion gearsets can be inconsistent in both material and heat-treating. Interestingly enough, the heat treating process is the most likely place that some overseas manufacturers skimp. Labor and machining is cheap; heat-treating and the electricity used for the process isn't.

You also have to consider that an axle assembly is designed as a system for a specific maximum load. Increasing the strength of only a part of that system is like installing a large link in the middle of a small chain. Simply throwing a stronger ring-and-pinion into an axlehousing may not solve gear failure issues. Axle housings flex under load because of gear deflection, which is an extremely common cause of ring-and-pinion failure. Increasing the strength of the ring-and-pinion does nothing to stop deflection and housing flex. In many cases, the only true solution is to throw more metal at it and upgrade to a larger axle

WHERE TO WRITE

Have a 4x4 tech question you want answered in Techline, drop an email to editor@fourwheeler.com or head on over to our forums at fourwheeler.com. All letters become the property of Four Wheeler, and we reserve the right to edit them for length, accuracy, and clarity. Due to the volume of mail, electronic and otherwise, we cannot respond to every reader, but we do read everything.

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assembly. Adding a load bolt can help to control gear deflection and housing flex in some cases. Jantz Engineering (jantz4x4.com) offers Jana load bolt upgrades and Jana girdles to help control ring-and-pinion deflection and axlehousing flex. Jantz also offers ring-and-pinion upgrades. The Jana 76 kit allows the use of a larger Dana 70 ring-and-pinion in your Dana 60 housing. Similar kits are available for the traditional Dana 44. Additionally, you could upgrade to a more rigid casting specifically designed for high-load applications, like one from Dynatrac (dynatrac.com). A more rigid cast center chunk will do more to keep gears alive in abusive conditions than cryogenically treating or polishing a ring-and-pinion.

When you reroute horsepower and torque to make a 90-degree right and left turn, a lot of energy is lost in the process. The ring-and-pinion in your axles provides a means to make that 90-degree turn. The driveshaft spins the pinion gear, which transmits power to the ring gear. The ring gear spins the carrier and axleshafts, which turn the wheels. Micro polishing a ring-and-pinion gearset involves polishing the mating surfaces of the gear teeth. This is generally done to reduce friction. Less friction means less heat and less parasitic drag. This process is usually reserved for

circle track and drag racing applications where an extra $\frac{1}{10}$ of a second can mean the difference between winning and losing a race. For most off-road guys, it's probably a waste of money, unless your axle has a tendency to overheat. However, if that's the case, you likely have other issues or you are overloading the axle assembly.

If you only use your 4x4 off-road and are regularly busting the teeth off of a ring-and-pinion gearset, there is another option you can try. Companies such as Mark Williams Enterprises (markwilliams.com) offer softer "pro" drag racing gearsets. These gears are made from a 9310 alloy and are not heat-treated to be as hard as traditional street-driven ring-and-pinion gearsets made from 8620 alloy. The gear teeth made of softer material absorb the abusive shock loading that can cause standard ring-and-pinion teeth to shatter. Unfortunately, these gears are not for street use and can't be driven on for extended periods of time. You might get a few thousand miles out of them if you treat them right and can keep them cool. It's certainly a viable option if you are a ham-fisted driver and don't have the time or money for a complete axle-swap upgrade. The applications for 9310 pro gears are limited, but you can usually find them for Dana 60, Ford 9-inch, and GM 12-bolt axles.



SURFACE RUSTED

Q I have a '94 Ram 1500 4x4. It has the stock 5.2L 318ci V-8, automatic transmission, and transfer case. It has been sitting a few years on the family farm. What benefits would I gain from cleaning the surface rust from the frame and components underneath? I'm in the process of replacing brake lines and fuel lines. It's also getting new shocks all around and new shock towers up front with a leveling kit. I want to install a body lift in the future to squeeze in 35-inch tires. It will be my daily driver. The truck currently sits on 33x12.50R15 mud tires with steel wheels. The Ram doesn't see many trails but does hit occasional mud, snow, and sand in the southern New Jersey wetlands. Any insight is greatly appreciated.

ROBERT SASSI
VIA EMAIL

A A light surface rust usually isn't a big deal. However, you have to make sure that that's all it is. Sometimes the surface rust can hide a much worse problem, especially if the frame is significantly rusted from the inside out. You should poke around with a sharp chisel or awl. Look for soft spots in the frame that are nearly rusted through. Anything that looks questionable should be repaired. Auto Rust Technicians (autorust.com) has Safe-T-Cap frame patch panels for many different makes and models of vehicles. These can be welded in place once the rusty areas have been ground down to clean steel. Unfortunately, the company does not offer frame patch panels for Dodge or Ram trucks, but you can take a look at some of the available products to get an idea of how to build your own patch panels if they are needed.

It's never a good idea to leave a rusty frame free to rot, especially in an area where the roads are salted in winter. You want to protect the metal as best you can. Several different products are available from POR-15 (por15.com). I'd recommend that you scrub the frame really good and apply POR-15 Rust Preventative Coating. This coating can be painted directly over rust. It stops the rust and also seals and protects the surface from water, chemicals, salt, and other corrosive contaminants.

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WEIGHTED ROUND SPRINGS

Regarding "Round Spring Swap" (Aug. '15), how well will the coilovers take on the added weight of a snowplow and rock salt.

ELIAS COREY

VIA FACEBOOK.COM/JOHNCPA4X4

The JD Fabrication (jdfabrication.com) '99-'06 GM 4x4 coilover conversion kit offers a lot of adjustability. It can be ordered for any amount of lift and the coil adjusters can be used to tune in the precise ride height you are looking for. Trucks that regularly carry heavier loads in the form of snowplows, slide-in campers, and so on, can be ordered with firmer coils if need be. The increased wheel travel, stronger steering bits, and improved ground clearance will benefit pretty much every application.

CHORD

I have a '71 GMC C25 two-wheel-drive truck and a 350ci small-block backed by a TH350 automatic transmission. I like to speed across the desert, and I don't do much 'crawling. I want to swap in a wider-than-stock TTB front suspension off of a '80-'96 Ford Bronco, and I need to mount a Ford NP205 transfer case behind the GM tranny to work with the TTB. Is the Ford NP205 a straight swap onto a TH350, or do I need to change the output shaft? Also, if I want to put a 700R4 transmission in my truck, will the NP205 work with that?

AGUSTIN JIMENEZ

VIA EMAIL

Unfortunately, you are trying to mix and match some parts that don't play nice with each other and will not go together very easily. There will be some grinding, cutting, fabricating, drilling, and reworking required. Advance Adapters (advanceadapters.com) offers a Ford NP208 adapter (PN 50-6904) that should get you most of the way to mating the TH350 to the Ford NP205. This adapter is designed for an NP208 and can be used with both the TH350 and 700R4. Another option would be to contact Offroad Design (offroaddesign.com). The company specializes in fullsize off-road trucks and has several adapter, transfer case, crawl box, and transmission packages that may get you where you want to be.

If you change your mind and are looking to keep the swap simpler, I'd recommend scrapping the use of the Ford NP205 transfer case and go with a driver-drop NV241 from a GM application. This transfer case will adapt much more easily to your TH350 or the 700R4, and it will put the front driveshaft on the correct side to match the Ford TTB front suspension. **FW**

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September 2000: Bummer Dude!

In the Sept. '00 issue of *Four Wheeler*, we trotted out the first story in a series about contributor Jim Allen's Project Bummer Dude. This project included removing the body of Project Blazer, a diesel-powered '83 K5, and replacing it with a Tatonka Products Bummer fiberglass utility body. At the time, and even now, this could be considered heresy by the K5 faithful. As a matter of fact, we recently put Project Bummer Dude on the list of the worst *Four Wheeler* projects ("Five Floppers," Aug. '14). Ouch.

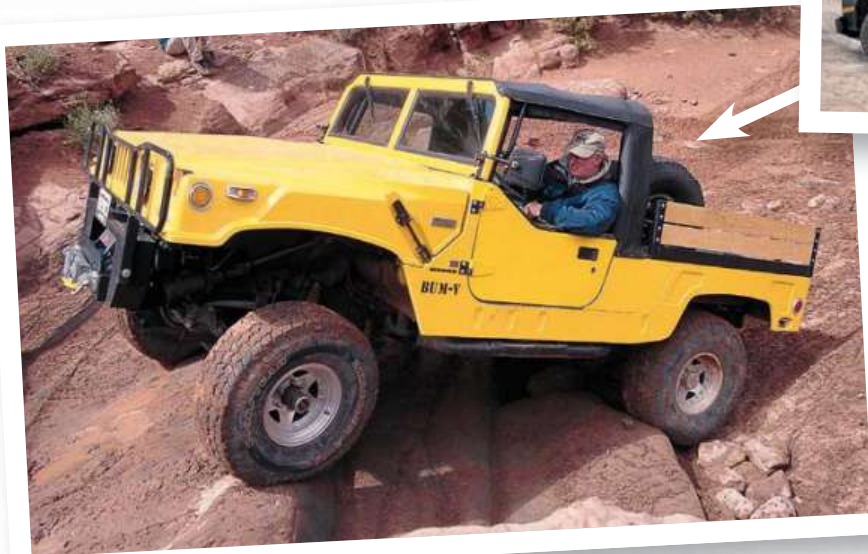
The Bummer looked suspiciously like a certain military-based vehicle that was red hot at the time. The story noted that the body fit most GM, Ford, and Dodge trucks and SUVs. It could be configured as a long- or short-wheelbase pickup with seating for four passengers; as a two-door short-wheelbase rig to seat four or five; or as an eight-seat four-door. There was even a 12-seat rig for a crew cab chassis. The story noted that most Bummers were configured as open-topped, folding-windshield machines with hose-out interiors, and a full hardtop rig was on the drawing board. The conversion was completed at Tatonka's Salt Lake City facility in

just more than a week's time and included three new frame crossmembers. One of the unseen challenges to the conversion was the diesel engine, which forced relocation of the body mountings.

K5 body removal aside (happily, the body was sold to a gent who trashed his K5's body in a rollover), the project actually made

➔ **"PRIOR TO THE CONVERSION, THE K5 WEIGHED 6,400 POUNDS. WITH THE BUMMER BODY INSTALLED THE WEIGHT DROPPED TO 3,880 POUNDS. THIS 2,520-POUND WEIGHT SAVINGS TRANSLATED TO IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE GAINS."**

sense when looking at performance improvements alone. Prior to the conversion, the K5 weighed 6,400 pounds. With the Bummer body installed the weight dropped to 3,880 pounds. This 2,520-pound weight savings translated to impressive performance gains. "That's lighter than some Jeeps we've seen, and it was enough to cut a full 2 seconds off the Blazer's best 0-60 time of 14.4 seconds," Allen wrote. The story went on to say, "The new front, rear, and center crossmembers have really tightened the chassis up, both on and off the highway. It holds a line better in highway turns, and surprisingly, the chassis twist (a GM trademark) on the trail has been much reduced." Allen reported better performance in climbing and descending on the trail, as well as a tighter torque converter feel due to the lower vehicle weight, which had the effect of lowering the stall speed. Allen also noted that the rig was a bit more nose heavy, which "translated into more pull from



the frontend on climbs" and that he could run much lower tire pressures due to the lighter weight.

Allen drove Project Bummer Dude for six years before selling it. The Bummer bodies are no longer in production.

Was the fold-down windshield, hose-out interior, 4x5-foot cargo bed, convertible, removable-door, four-passenger, diesel-powered Project Bummer Dude a wheelers dream or one of the worst projects ever? Email us at ken.brubaker@fourwheeler.com and tell us what you think. **FW**

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